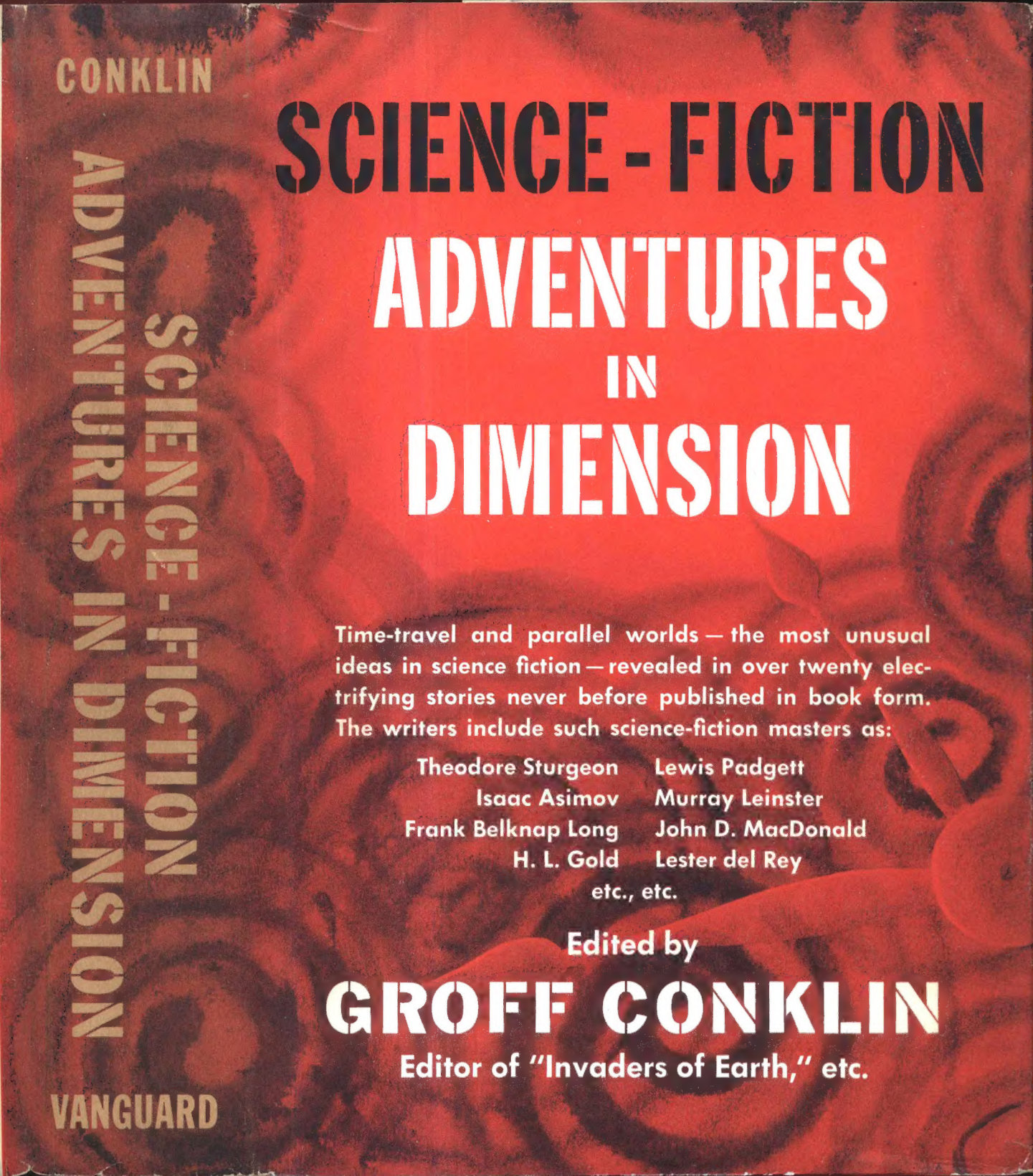

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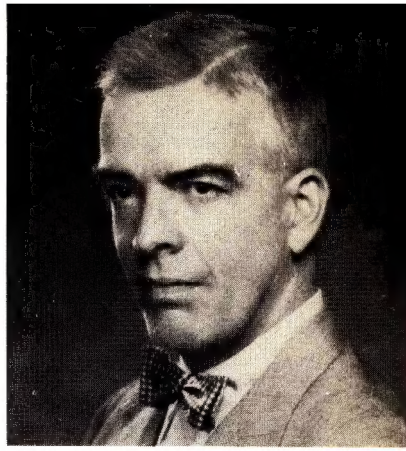
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INVADERS OF EARTH

Science-Fiction Adventures in Dimension

Edited by GROFF CONKLIN
Editor of "Invaders of Earth," etc.

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G. C.

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INTRODUCTION

ONCE in a while some earnest soul asks me for a definition of science fiction. I am then obliged to confess that I haven't formulated any precise definition, and neither has anyone else, to my knowledge—at least not one that everyone would agree with. Of course, now and then those of us who are interested in the subject come up with a contribution that may eventually constitute part of an acceptable whole. My latest addition to this stock pile of ideas is this: Science fiction is based on scientific ideas that have not been proved impossible.

My first two Vanguard collections pretty well illustrated this point, I think. *Possible Worlds* dealt—sometimes in a pretty fantastic way, I admit—with the definitely scientific notion of space travel (see *Time* for December 8, 1952, and *Collier's* for October 18-25, 1952, for evidence) and with the types of life that may exist elsewhere in the Galaxy. *Invaders of Earth* had various alien forms of life from other worlds making contact with us on Earth in one way or another, some of the ways rather peculiar, but on the whole scientifically quite possible. From the point of view of the popular press, the alien invasion is already in the realm of possibility—the flying saucers and their alien crews—(see *Life* for April 7, 1952, and *True* for January and March, 1950).

The present volume, dealing with time travel and parallel worlds, is also science fiction by the above definition, since no one has ever actually *proved,* so far as I know, that such travel cannot happen or that other-dimensional worlds do not exist. On the other hand, aside from some wholly abstract thinking by mathematicians and philosophers of physics and astrophysics, the only "evidence" adduced for their existence comes from metaphysicians and from science-fiction writers. This removes the question of their existence from the "possibility" side of the ledger and places it squarely on the opposite side under the head of fantasy. And here time and travel and parallel worlds

will stay, at least until someone comes along with more tangible proof of their probability than we now have

To call the stories in this book science fantasy rather than science fiction is, to my mind, no slur. Some of the most challenging stories I have ever read fall into this category. There is in the notion of time-as-a-dimension such vast scope for unusual ideas, such enormous freedom for new concepts, such a great opportunity for irony, tragedy, paradox, wit, that I am continually finding new and unusual material in the genre—something that cannot be said with such assurance, these days, about other types of science fiction.

Furthermore, the fact that these stories are classed as fantasy does not mean that they can have no serious import. As you will find on reading, several authors use dimensional concepts as vehicles for the expression of sharp comment on the ailments of our time and the foibles of man. If you imagine that you can travel forward to a better world, for example, you can write a peppery piece about what is wrong with ours, and many of the better science-fiction writers have done just that. Others have written of terrifying futures, in an effort to put over some idea of a way of avoiding that future by altering our actions today. Time travel is not, therefore, all beer and skittles!

Now let's take a brief glance at the kinds of time adventure that have been developed in science fiction during its history. The simplest approach has been to consider time as a sort of "corridor," a "tunnel through space-time," through which one can move backward to the past or forward to the future. This description also covers the two other simple types of time travel: from the future to the present, which is merely travel into the past (considering "now" to be "past"); and from the past to the present (considering "present" to be "future").

Perhaps the most popular category of time stories is that which takes us into the future. It is so popular, I believe, because it offers the writer an easy device for the description of his favorite Utopia (or anti-Utopia) in terms of the society he has left (i.e., ours). H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* is the classic example of this sort of travel-into-the-future. In the present collection, only two of the four tales included in the "Present to Future" section have a semi-Utopian aspect—William Bade's "Ambition," and Lester del Rey's ". . . And It Comes Out Here," which is a fairly wry view of a "better" future. The other two tales are straight dream stuff, particularly Theodore Sturgeon's

story of a man who found himself onstage while the scene setters were getting Wednesday ready. Murray Leinster's tale, too, is strictly for fun, a neat bit of hop-scotch with metaphysics.

Time travel backward, our second category, appeals to some writers as more "possible." They view the time corridor as extending in one direction only: to events that have already happened. These writers don't like the predestinarian idea that the future already exists; they believe that it only happens as it happens. However, traveling in the past also involves some highly unlikely eventualities, among which the problem of the time paradox is the most fascinating. Hardly a story of travel into the past has ever been written that did not bring to mind the difficult point that one might meet oneself—and then what? Or cause a basic change in past events—in which case what would happen? Marion Gross's "The Good Provider" simply sidesteps the issue by not mentioning it, and Amelia Long's "Reverse Phylogeny" gets around it successfully by having only the memories, rather than the actual bodies, of the protagonists glide into the past. This story also takes its characters so far back that they would hardly be likely to meet their own ancestors. The same type of time travel is used in one of the classics of science fiction, John Taine's *Before the Dawn.*

The paradox of backward time travel is met head on in the other two stories in this section. A. Bertram Chandler's "Castaway" boldly accepts the paradox as insoluble and makes a horrifying little story out of it. William Sell's precedent-breaking "Other Tracks," on the other hand, provides that whenever anyone goes back and then returns, he returns to a world different from the one he left, a world changed by the very fact that he *did* go back. Here the paradox receives its most logical treatment.

The third variety of travel in time, from past to present, is very rarely encountered in science fiction, since it does not offer much in the way of dramatic opportunity. Day Keene's "What So Proudly We Hail . . . " makes as much as can possibly be made out of the notion, and does so with real effectiveness. Ray Bradbury's "Night Meeting," on the other hand, assumes the past-in-the-present and, like most of his tales, stands alone in its strange loveliness. One should not have to try to fit this story into a category, as I have had to here, for it is uncomfortable in any such formal strait jacket.

Time travel from the future to the present, our fourth group,

is nearly as popular with the science-fiction writers as is time travel from the present to the future. Here (usually) the stories have to do with a futurian who wants to change the past so that his future, or the world's future, will be better—or at least different. Lewis Padgett's "Endowment Policy" shows us a mean and selfish man of the future, and is also an excellent example of the time paradox. A man meets himself as a boy and tries to change the course of his life. It doesn't work, naturally. . . . Horace Gold's "Perfect Murder" (also about a selfish man of tomorrow) picks up the time paradox by the tail and lets it yowl in confusion. This is the sort of story it must be fun to write!

The other side of the picture is shown by Raymond Jones's ominous "Pete Can Fix It," with its frightening shuttle back and forth in time to tell of a selfless futurian, a man who is desperately anxious to help the people of today avert a future which, in his world, has actually happened. E. M. Hull's "The Flight That Failed" reports on a man from the future who actually helps us avert a calamity that had happened in his own world.

There is one other type of time-travel story that is purposely not represented here. This is the tale of travel from the future to the past. Most of these stories tell of future scientists who go back in time on archaeological expeditions, or traders who travel back to negotiate profitable deals in past ages. My only excuse for not including this type of story is that I could find no example that I particularly liked. The whole concept is somehow fuzzy, and so, it seems to me, are the stories written about it. There may be, of course, some excellent examples that I may have missed; to their authors I herewith make my apologies in advance.

As far as pure time stories go, the field is just about covered. There are hundreds upon hundreds of variants, but on the whole I think our classification is a complete one. The other half of the concept of *Adventures in Dimension* involves the notion of parallel, or simultaneous, or alternate, or coexistent worlds or universes. The planets in touch with Earth may be Earthlike or they may be completely different. Both types are represented here.

One of the bridges between the time story and the parallel-world story in which the parallel world is Earthlike is William Sell's "Other Tracks," previously mentioned. Here it is assumed that the various

worlds the protagonist enters in the past remain in existence even though he is not in all of them. The same idea, "meta-scientifically" expressed, exists in the writings of certain modern theoretical metaphysicians—*not* fiction writers—who propound the theory that, since time is infinite, every conceivable kind of world, representing every conceivable variation on the least act of the smallest individual, has existed an infinite number of times in the past and will exist that many times again in the future. This ponderous concept becomes so uncomfortable to handle in fiction that most writers prefer kindergarten simplifications of the idea, which they use in a variety of entertaining ways, as you will see.

Merely assume the existence of a parallel world, with interminglings difficult but possible, and you have a story like Peter Cartur's "The Mist." Or another sort of world that can be reached only by a strange sort of "thinking" about it, and Miles J. Breuer's "The Gostak and the Doshes" comes to mind.

Or imagine alternate worlds commencing with the commission or noncommission of a specific act, and you have a story like Isaac Asimov's "What If . . ." Similar tales have appeared many times in the past; Britain's famed Prime Minister Winston Churchill once wrote one. Think of one other world, exactly like ours except that time is a little faster there, so that by now it is about a thousand years ahead of us, and you have William F. Temple's "Way of Escape." This, like "What If . . . ," presumes a splitting off, upon the occurrence of some event, of an alternate world; only in this instance the event is far in the past.

Or conceive of an infinite number of different worlds that can be "reached" by a complex machine on our Earth, and you have strange concepts like John D. MacDonald's "Ring Around the Redhead." Alan E. Nourse's "Tiger by the Tail" imagines a single other world, and between it and us a physical fourth-dimensional condition, or "hole," through which objects may pass.

Then there is the other universe with a time scale vastly swifter than ours; this you will find in Roger Flint Young's "Suburban Frontiers." Fritz Leiber's "Business of Killing" assumes an infinite number of worlds, and one man who is able to travel between them. Finally, Frank Belknap Long's "To Follow Knowledge" involves a machine that makes contact with many different worlds simultaneously—in this instance through an error, the results of which are terrifying.

The parallel-world concept is thus as varied and as fresh as the outlook of the writers who tackle it. There is no possible way of categorizing stories of this sort, as there is with "simple" time-travel tales. All one can predict is that each one will be different; this is one reason, I am sure, why the idea attracts such good writers in the science-fiction field.

Incidentally, in talking about science fiction to groups of people, among them hundreds of high-school boys and girls, I have recently begun to notice an interesting change in point of view, which I believe is a good one. When I first became interested in the subject, some eight years ago, what discussion there was seemed always to be centered around the relative probability of the phenomena described in the stories and the estimated time when they would "come true." This interest is still paramount today, but it seems to me that the emphasis on the point is not quite so heavy as it was and that other aspects of science fiction are becoming important.

For example, I find it gratifying that many science-fiction readers today, and especially the young people, are becoming more concerned with the freshness and the variety of science-fiction concepts, and the excellence with which they are presented, than they are with whether or not these concepts turn out to be true predictions of things to come. A novel idea, whether scientific or pseudoscientific, is useful because it stretches the mind the way a good game of tennis or football stretches the body. It helps to develop the unused muscles of the imagination. It is this aspect of science fiction, and specifically of the adventures in dimension included in this book, that intrigues me most. These stories are genuine experiments in free-wheeling make-believe. They have no other reason for being. And for that reason alone—that they will test the elasticity of your mind—they are worth the time you take off from your various humdrum pursuits to read them.

I would like to thank Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, H. L. Gold, Murray Leinster, and Theodore Sturgeon for suggesting stories of their own for inclusion in this book and for helping me thereby to clarify my own ideas about time travel and dimensional adventures.

Thanks are also due to a number of other friends for various favors, to the discerning folk at the Vanguard Press for the faith they continue to show in my taste, aberrant though it may be at times, and to

Lucy, of course. Her enjoyment in the play of ideas, the unexpected turns and twists and quirks of plot so often found in other-dimensional stories, encourages me to believe that I am far from being alone in my admiration for this highly special subdivision of the science-fiction field.

GROFF CONKLIN

TIME TALES

Present to Future

WHAT tomorrow will be like, no one knows. All we *think* we know for sure is: "Tomorrow will *be*." It is perhaps also safe to say that it will be—different.

Many science-fiction writers who deal with travel into future time make no pretense of knowing what it will be like, either. Thus, in this section we have four stories, only one of which really takes us into a distant future and describes what it may be like. Another is a curious sort of circular pattern with a clear picture of *something*, but whether it is the future isn't made too clear because the story doesn't establish beyond reasonable doubt whether there *is* any tomorrow.

As for the other two, they simply ignore the matter and have a lot of fun with the forward notion of forward motion in time. These are really much more "logical" tales about the future, because the future never catches up with them to prove them right or wrong. They don't prophesy—they just are. And very amusing, too.

Theodore Sturgeon

YESTERDAY WAS MONDAY

The purpose of putting this blithely incredible story first is to give you a massive dose of disorientation. Time-travel stories do that to you, and you might as well get used to it. . . . Indeed, the delightful thing about this particular item is the way in which it throws you off balance by denying perfectly obvious things like Tuesday, or, rather, one particular Tuesday for one particular man. Let us devoutly hope that Harry Wright's trouble isn't catching!

HARRY WRIGHT rolled over and said something spelled "Bzzzzh-ha-a-aw!" He chewed a bit on a mouthful of dry air and spat it out, opened one eye to see if it really would open, opened the other and closed the first, closed the second, swung his feet onto the floor, opened his eyes again, and stretched. This was a daily occurrence, and the only thing that made it remarkable at all was that he did it on a Wednesday morning, and—

Yesterday was Monday.

Oh, he knew it was Wednesday, all right. It was partly that, even though he knew yesterday was Monday, there was a gap between Monday and now; and that must have been Tuesday. When you fall asleep and lie there all night without dreaming, you know, when you wake up, that time has passed. You've done nothing that you can remember; you had no particular thoughts, no way to gauge time, and yet you know that some hours have passed. So it was with Harry Wright. Tuesday had gone wherever your eight hours went last night.

But he hadn't slept through Tuesday. Oh, no. He never slept, as a matter of fact, more than six hours at a stretch, and there was no particular reason for his doing so now. Monday was the day before yesterday; he had turned in and slept his usual stretch, he had awakened, and it was Wednesday.

It *felt* like Wednesday. There was a Wednesdayish feel to the air.

Harry put on his socks and stood up. He wasn't fooled. He knew what day it was. "What happened to yesterday?" he muttered. "Oh—yesterday was Monday." That sufficed until he got his pajamas off.

"Monday," he mused, reaching for his underwear, "was quite a while back, seems as though." If he had been the worrying type he would have started then and there. But he wasn't. He was an easygoing sort, the kind of man that gets himself into a rut and stays there until he is pushed out. That was why he was an automobile mechanic at twenty-three dollars a week; that's why he had been one for eight years now, and would be from now on—if he could only find Tuesday and get back to work.

Guided by his reflexes, as usual, and with no mental effort at all, which was also usual, he finished washing, dressing, and making his bed. His alarm clock, which never alarmed because he was of such regular habits, said, as usual, six twenty-two as he paused on the way out and gave his room the once-over. And there was a certain something about the place that made even this phlegmatic character stop and think.

It wasn't finished.

The bed was there, and the picture of Joe Louis. There were the two chairs sharing their usual seven legs, the split table, the pipe-organ bedstead, the beige wallpaper with the two swans over and over and over, the tiny corner sink, the tilted bureau. But none of them was finished. Not that there were any holes in anything. What paint there had been in the first place was still there. But there was an odor of old cut lumber, a subtle, insistent air of building about the room and everything in it. It was indefinable, inescapable; and Harry Wright stood there caught up in it, wondering. He glanced suspiciously around but saw nothing he could really be suspicious of. He shook his head, locked the door, and went out into the hall.

On the steps a little fellow, just over three feet tall, was gently stroking the third step from the top with a razor-sharp chisel, shaping up a new scar in the dirty wood. He looked up as Harry approached, and stood up quickly.

"Hi," said Harry, taking in the man's leather coat, his peaked cap, and his wizened, bright-eyed little face. "Whatcha doing?"

"Touch-up," piped the little man. "The actor in the third floor front has a nail in his right heel. He came in late Tuesday night and cut the wood here. I have to get it ready for Wednesday."

"This is Wednesday," Harry pointed out.

"Of course. Always has been. Always will be."

Harry let that pass, started on down the stairs. He had achieved

his amazing bovinity by making a practice of ignoring things he could not understand. But one thing bothered him—

"Did you say that feller in the third floor front was an actor?"

"Yes. They're all actors, you know."

"You're nuts, friend," said Harry bluntly. "That guy works on the docks."

"Oh, yes—that's his part. That's what he acts."

"No kiddin'. An' what does he do when he isn't acting?"

"But he— Well, that's all he does do! That's all any of the actors do!"

"Gee— I thought he looked like a reg'lar guy, too," said Harry. "An actor! 'Magine!"

"Excuse me," said the little man, "but I've got to get back to work. We mustn't let anything get by us, you know. They'll be through Tuesday before long, and everything must be ready for them."

Harry thought: This guy's crazy nuts. He smiled uncertainly and went down to the landing below. When he looked back the man was cutting skillfully into the stair, making a neat little nail scratch. Harry shook his head. This was a screwy morning. He'd be glad to get back to the shop. There was a '39 sedan down there with a busted rear spring. Once he got his mind on that he could forget this nonsense. That's all that matters to a man in a rut. Work, eat, sleep, payday. Why even try to think anything else out?

The street was a riot of activity, but then it always was. But not quite this way. There were automobiles and trucks and buses around, a-plenty, but none of them was moving. And none of them was quite complete. This was Harry's own field; if there was anything he didn't know about motor vehicles, it wasn't very important. And through that medium he began to get the general idea of what was going on.

Swarms of little men who might have been twins of the one he had spoken to were crowding around the cars, the sidewalks, the stores and buildings. All were working like mad with every tool imaginable. Some were touching up the finish of the cars with fine wire brushes, laying on networks of microscopic cracks and scratches. Some, with ball peens and mallets, were denting fenders skillfully, bending bumpers in an artful crash pattern, spiderwebbing safety-glass windshields. Others were aging top dressing with high-pressure, needle-point sand blasters. Still others were pumping dust into upholstery, sandpapering the dashboard finish around light switches, throttles, chokes, to give a finger-worn appearance. Harry stood aside as a half dozen of the work-

ers scampered down the street bearing a fender which they riveted to a 1930 coupé. It was freshly bloodstained.

Once awakened to this highly unusual activity, Harry stopped, slightly open-mouthed, to watch what else was going on. He saw the same process being industriously accomplished with the houses and stores. Dirt was being laid on plate-glass windows over a coat of clear sizing. Woodwork was being cleverly scored and the paint peeled to make it look correctly weatherbeaten, and dozens of leather-clad laborers were on their hands and knees, poking dust and dirt into the cracks between the paving blocks. A line of them went down the sidewalk, busily chewing gum and spitting it out; they were followed by another crew who carefully placed the wads according to diagrams they carried, and stamped them flat.

Harry set his teeth and muscled his rocking brain into something like its normal position. "I ain't never seen a day like this or crazy people like this," he said, "but I ain't gonna let it be any of my affair. I got my job to go to." And, trying vainly to ignore the hundreds of little, hard-working figures, he went grimly on down the street.

When he got to the garage he found no one there but more swarms of streotyped little people climbing over the place, dulling the paint work, cracking the cement flooring, doing their hurried, efficient little tasks of aging. He noticed, only because he was so familiar with the garage, that they were actually *making* the marks that had been there as long as he had known the place. "Hell with it," he gritted, anxious to submerge himself into his own world of wrenches and grease guns. "I got my job; this is none o' my affair."

He looked about him, wondering if he should clean these interlopers out of the garage. Naw—not his affair. He was hired to repair cars, not to police the joint. Long as they kept away from him—and, of course, animal caution told him that he was far, far outnumbered. The absence of the boss and the other mechanics was no surprise to Harry; he always opened the place.

He climbed out of his street clothes and into coveralls, picked up a tool case, and walked over to the sedan, which he had left up on the hydraulic rack yester—— that is, Monday night. And that is when Harry Wright lost his temper. After all, the car was his job, and he didn't like having anyone else mess with a job he had started. So when he saw his job—his '39 sedan—resting steadily on its wheels over the rack, which was down under the floor, and when he saw

that the rear spring was repaired, he began to burn. He dived under the car and ran deft fingers over the rear-wheel suspensions. In spite of his anger at this unprecedented occurrence he had to admit to himself that the job had been done well. "Might have done it myself," he muttered.

A soft clank and a gentle movement caught his attention. With a roar he reached out and grabbed the leg of one of the ubiquitous little men, wriggled out from under the car, caught his culprit by his leather collar, and dangled him at arm's length.

"What are you doing to my job?" Harry bellowed.

The little man tucked his chin into the front of his shirt to give his windpipe a chance, and said, "Why, I was just finishing up that spring job."

"Oh. Sure you were just finishing up that spring job," Harry whispered, choked with rage. Then, at the top of his voice, "Who told you to touch that car?"

"Who told me? What do you— Well, it just had to be done, that's all. You'll have to let me go. I must tighten up those two bolts and lay some dust on the whole thing."

"You must *what?* You get within six feet o' that car and I'll twist your head offn your neck with a Stillson!"

"But— It has to be done!"

"You won't do it! Why, I oughta—"

"Please let me go! If I don't leave that car the way it was Tuesday night—"

"When was Tuesday night?"

"The last act, of course. Let me go or I'll call the district supervisor!"

"Call the devil himself. I'm going to spread you on the sidewalk outside; and heaven help you if I catch you near here again!"

The little man's jaw set, his eyes narrowed, and he whipped his feet upward. They crashed into Wright's jaw; Harry dropped him and staggered back. The little man began squealing, "Supervisor! Supervisor! Emergency!"

Harry growled and started after him; but suddenly, in the air between him and the midget workman, a long white hand appeared. The empty air was swept back, showing an aperture from the garage to blank, blind nothingness. Out of it stepped a tall man in a single loose-fitting garment literally studded with pockets. The opening closed behind the man.

Harry cowered before him. Never in his life had he seen such noble,

powerful features, such strength of purpose, such broad shoulders, such a deep chest. The man stood with the backs of his hands on his hips, staring at Harry as if he were something somebody forgot to sweep up.

"That's him," said the little man shrilly. "He is trying to stop me from doing the work!"

"Who are you?" asked the beautiful man, down his nose.

"I'm the m-mechanic on this j-j— Who wants to know?"

"Iridel, supervisor of the district of Futura, wants to know."

"Where in hell did you come from?"

"I did not come from hell. I came from Thursday."

Harry held his head. "What *is* all this?" he wailed. "Why is today Wednesday? Who are all these crazy little guys? What happened to Tuesday?"

Iridel made a slight motion with his finger, and the little man scurried back under the car. Harry was frenzied to hear the wrench busily tightening bolts. He half started to dive under after the little fellow, but Iridel said "Stop!" and when Iridel said "Stop!" Harry stopped.

"This," said Iridel calmly, "is an amazing occurrence." He regarded Harry with unemotional curiosity. "An actor on stage before the sets are finished. Extraordinary."

"What stage?" asked Harry. "What are you doing here anyhow, and what's the idea of all these little guys working around here?"

"You ask a great many questions, actor," said Iridel. "I shall answer them and then I shall have a few to ask you. These little men are stagehands— I am surprised that you didn't realize that. They are setting the stage for Wednesday. Tuesday? That's going on now."

"Arrgh!" Harry snorted. "How can Tuesday be going on when today's Wednesday?"

"Today isn't Wednesday, actor."

"Huh?"

"Today is Tuesday."

Harry scratched his head. "Met a feller on the steps this mornin'— one of these here stagehands of yours. He said this was Wednesday."

"It *is* Wednesday. Today is Tuesday. Tuesday is today. 'Today' is simply the name for the stage set which happens to be in use. 'Yesterday' means the set that has just been used; 'Tomorrow' is the set that will be used after the actors have finished with 'today.' This is Wednesday. Yesterday was Monday; today is Tuesday. See?"

Harry said, "No."

Iridel threw up his long hands. "My, you actors are stupid. Now listen carefully. This is Act Wednesday, Scene 6:22. That means that everything you see around you here is being readied for 6:22 A.M. on Wednesday. Wednesday isn't a time; it's a place. The actors are moving along toward it now. I see you still don't get the idea. Let's see . . . ah. Look at that clock. What does it say?"

Harry Wright looked at the big electric clock on the wall over the compressor. It was corrected hourly and was highly accurate, and it said 6:22. Harry looked at it, amazed. "Six tw—— but my gosh, man, that's what time I left the house. I walked here, an' I been here ten minutes already!"

Iridel shook his head. "You've been here no time at all, because there is no time until the actors make their entrances."

Harry sat down on a grease drum and wrinkled up his brains with the effort he was making. "You mean that this time proposition ain't something that moves along all the time? Sorta—well, like a road. A road don't go no place— You just go places along it. Is that it?"

"That's the general idea. In fact, that's a pretty good example. Suppose we say that it's a road; a highway built of paving blocks. Each block is a day; the actors move along it and go through day after day. And our job here—mine and the little men—is to . . . well, pave that road. This is the clean-up gang here. They are fixing up the last little details so that everything will be ready for the actors."

Harry sat still, his mind creaking with the effects of information. He felt as if he had been hit with a lead pipe and the shock of it was being drawn out infinitely. This was the craziest-sounding thing he had ever run into. For no reason at all he remembered a talk he had had once with a drunken aviation mechanic who had tried to explain to him how the air flowing over an airplane's wings makes the machine go up in the air. He hadn't understood a word of the man's discourse, which was all about eddies and chords and cambers and foils, dihedrals and the Bernoulli effect. That didn't make any difference; the things flew whether he understood how or not; he knew that because he had seen them. This guy Iridel's lecture was the same sort of thing. If there was nothing in all he said, how come all these little guys were working around here? Why wasn't the clock telling time? Where was Tuesday?

He thought he'd get that straight for good and all. "Just where is Tuesday?" he asked.

"Over there," said Iridel, and pointed. Harry recoiled and fell off the drum; for when the man extended his hand, it *disappeared!*

Harry got up off the floor and said tautly, "Do that again."

"What? Oh— Point toward Tuesday? Certainly." And he pointed. His hand appeared again when he withdrew it.

Harry said, "My gosh!" and sat down again on the drum, sweating and staring at the supervisor of the district of Futura. "You point, an' your hand—ain't," he breathed. "What direction is that?"

"It is a direction like any other direction," said Iridel. "You know yourself there are four directions—forward, sideward, upward, and"—he pointed again, and again his hand vanished—*"that* way!"

"They never told me that in school," said Harry. "Course, I was just a kid then, but—"

Iridel laughed. "It is the fourth dimension—it is *duration*. The actors move through length, breadth, and height anywhere they choose to within the set. But there is another movement—one they can't control —and that is duration."

"How soon will they come . . . eh . . . here?" asked Harry, waving an arm. Iridel dipped into one of his numberless pockets and pulled out a watch. "It is now eight thirty-seven Tuesday morning," he said. "They'll be here as soon as they finish the act and the scenes in Wednesday that have already been prepared."

Harry thought again for a moment, while Iridel waited patiently, smiling a little. Then he looked up at the supervisor and asked, "Hey —this 'actor' business—what's that all about?"

"Oh—that. Well, it's a play, that's all. Just like any play—put on for the amusement of an audience."

"I was to a play once," said Harry. "Who's the audience?"

Iridel stopped smiling. "Certain—Ones who may be amused," he said. "And now I'm going to ask you some questions. How did you get here?"

"Walked."

"You *walked* from Monday night to Wednesday morning?"

"Naw— From the house to here."

"Ah— But how did you get to Wednesday, six twenty-two?"

"Well, I— Damfino. I just woke up an' came to work as usual."

"This is an extraordinary occurrence," said Iridel, shaking his head in puzzlement. "You'll have to see the producer."

"Producer? Who's he?"

"You'll find out. In the meantime, come along with me. I can't leave you here; you're too close to the play. I have to make my rounds, anyway."

Iridel walked toward the door. Harry was tempted to stay and find himself some more work to do, but when Iridel glanced back at him and motioned him out, Harry followed. It was suddenly impossible to do anything else.

Just as he caught up with the supervisor, a little worker ran up, whipping off his cap.

"Iridel, sir," he piped, "the weather-makers put six one-thousandths of one per cent too little moisture in the air on this set. There's three-seventeenths of an ounce too little gasoline in the storage tanks under here."

"How much is in the tanks?"

"Four thousand, two hundred and seventy-three gallons, three pints, seven and twenty-one thirty-fourths ounces."

Iridel grunted. "Let it go this time. That was very sloppy work. Someone's going to get transferred to Limbo for this."

"Very good, sir," said the little man. "Long as you know we're not responsible." He put on his cap, spun around three times, and rushed off.

"Lucky for the weather-makers that the amount of gas in that tank doesn't come into Wednesday's script," said Iridel. "If anything interferes with the continuity of the play, there's the devil to pay. Actors haven't sense enough to cover up, either. They are liable to start whole series of miscues because of a little thing like that. The play might flop and then we'd all be out of work."

"Oh," Harry ohed. "Hey, Iridel—what's the idea of that patchy-looking place over there?"

Iridel followed his eyes. Harry was looking at a corner lot. It was tree-lined and overgrown with weeds and small saplings. The vegetation was true to form around the edges of the lot and around the path that ran diagonally through it, but the spaces in between were plane surfaces. Not a leaf nor a blade of grass grew there; it was naked-looking, blank, and absolutely without any color whatever.

"Oh, that," answered Iridel. "There are only two characters in Act Wednesday who will use that path. Therefore it is as grown-over as it should be. The rest of the lot doesn't enter into the play, so we don't have to do anything with it."

"But— Suppose someone wandered off the path on Wednesday," Harry offered.

"He'd be due for a surprise, I guess. But it could hardly happen. Special prompters are always detailed to spots like that, to keep the actors from going astray or missing any cues."

"Who are they—the prompters, I mean?"

"Prompters? G.A.'s—Guardian Angels. That's what the script writers call them."

"I heard o' them," said Harry.

"Yes, they have their work cut out for them," said the supervisor. "Actors are always forgetting their lines when they shouldn't, or remembering them when the script calls for a lapse. Well, it looks pretty good here. Let's have a look at Friday."

"Friday? You mean to tell me you're working on Friday already?"

"Of course! Why, we work years in advance! How on earth do you think we could get our trees grown otherwise? Here—step in!" Iridel put out his hand, seized empty air, drew it aside to show the kind of absolute nothingness he had first appeared from, and waved Harry on.

"Y-you want me to go in there?" asked Harry diffidently.

"Certainly. Hurry, now!"

Harry looked at the section of void with a rather weak-kneed look but could not withstand the supervisor's strange compulsion. He stepped through.

And it wasn't so bad. There were no whirling lights, no sensations of falling, no falling unconscious. It was just like stepping into another room—which is what had happened. He found himself in a great round chamber whose roundness was touched a bit with the indistinct. That is, it had curved walls and a domed roof, but there was something else about it. It seemed to stretch off in that direction toward which Iridel had so astonishingly pointed. The walls were lined with an amazing array of control machinery—switches and ground-glass screens, indicators and dials, knurled knobs and levers. Moving deftly before them was a crew of men, all looking exactly like Iridel except that their garments had no pockets. Harry stood wide-eyed, hypnotized by the enormous complexity of the controls and the ease with which the men worked among them. Iridel touched his shoulder. "Come with me," he said. "The producer is in now; we'll find out what is to be done with you."

They started across the floor. Harry had not quite time to wonder how long it would take them to cross that enormous room, for when they had taken perhaps a dozen steps they found themselves at the opposite wall. The ordinary laws of space and time simply did not apply in the place.

They stopped at a door of burnished bronze, so very highly polished that they could see through it. It opened and Iridel pushed Harry through. The door swung shut. Harry, panic-stricken lest he be separated from the only thing in this weird world he could begin to get used to, flung himself against this great bronze portal. It bounced him back head over heels into the middle of the floor. He rolled over and got up onto his hands and knees.

He was in a tiny room, one end of which was filled by a colossal teakwood desk. The man sitting there regarded him with amusement. "Where'd you blow in from?" he asked, and his voice was like the angry bee sound of an approaching hurricane.

"Are you the producer?"

"Well, I'll be darned," said the man, and smiled. It seemed to fill the whole room with light. He was a big man, Harry noticed, but in this deceptive place there was no way of telling how big. "I'll be most verily darned. An actor. You're a persistent lot, aren't you? Building houses for me that I almost never go into. Getting together and sending requests for better parts. Listening carefully to what I have to say and then ignoring or misinterpreting my advice. Always asking for just one more chance, and when you get it, messing that up, too. And now one of you crashes the gate. What's your trouble, anyway?"

There was something about the producer that bothered Harry but he could not place what it was, unless it was the fact that the man awed him and he didn't know why. "I woke up in Wednesday," he stammered, "and yesterday was Tuesday. I mean Monday. I mean —" He cleared his throat and started over. "I went to sleep Monday night and woke up Wednesday, and I'm looking for Tuesday."

"What do you want me to do about it?"

"Well—couldn't you tell me how to get back there? I got work to do."

"Oh—I get it," said the producer. "You want a favor from me. You know, some day some one of you fellows is going to come to me wanting to give me something, free and for nothing, and then I am

going to drop quietly dead. Don't I have enough trouble running this show without taking up time and space by doing favors for the likes of you?" He drew a couple of breaths and then smiled again. "However—I have always tried to be just, even if it is a tough job sometimes. Go on out and tell Iridel to show you the way back. I think I know what happened to you; when you made your exit from the last act you played in, you somehow managed to walk out behind the wrong curtain when you reached the wings. There's going to be a prompter sent to Limbo for this. Go on now—beat it."

Harry opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and scuttled out the door, which opened before him. He stood in the huge control chamber, breathing hard. Iridel walked up to him.

"Well?"

"He says for you to get me out of here."

"All right," said Iridel. "This way." He led the way to a curtained doorway much like the one they had used to come in. Beside it were two dials, one marked in days and the other in hours and minutes.

"Monday night good enough for you?" asked Iridel.

"Swell," said Harry.

Iridel set the dials for 9:30 P.M. on Monday. "So long, actor. Maybe I'll see you again sometime."

"So long," said Harry. He turned and stepped through the door.

He was back in the garage, and there was no curtained doorway behind him. He turned to ask Iridel if this would enable him to go to bed again and do Tuesday right from the start, but Iridel was gone.

The garage was a blaze of light. Harry glanced at the clock—It said fifteen seconds after nine-thirty. That was funny; everyone should be home by now except Slim Jim, the night man, who hung out until four in the morning serving up gas at the pumps outside. A quick glance around sufficed. This might be Monday night, but it was a Monday night he hadn't known.

The place was filled with the little men again!

Harry sat on the fender of a convertible and groaned. "Now what have I got myself into?" he asked himself.

He could see that he was at a different place-in-time from the one in which he had met Iridel. There they had been working to build, working with a precision and nicety that was a pleasure to watch. But here—

The little men were different, in the first place. They were tired-

looking, sick, slow. There were scores of overseers about, and Harry winced with one of the little fellows when one of the men in white lashed out with a long whip. As the Wednesday crews worked, so the Monday gangs slaved. And the work they were doing was different. For here they were breaking down, breaking up, carting away. Before his eyes, Harry saw sections of paving lifted out, pulverized, toted away by the sackload by lines of trudging, browbeaten little men. He saw great beams upended to support the roof while bricks were pried out of the walls. He heard the gang working on the roof, saw patches of roofing torn away. He saw walls and roof both melt away under that driving, driven onslaught, and before he knew what was happening he was standing alone on a section of the dead-white plain he had noticed before on the corner lot.

It was too much for his overburdened mind; he ran out into the night, breaking through lines of laden slaves, through neat and growing piles of rubble, screaming for Iridel. He ran for a long time and finally dropped down behind a stack of lumber out where the Unitarian Church used to be, dropped because he could go no farther. He heard footsteps and tried to make himself smaller. They came on steadily; one of the overseers rounded the corner and stood looking at him. Harry was in deep shadow but he knew the man in white could see in the dark.

"Come out o' there," grated the man. Harry came out.

"You the guy was yellin' for Iridel?"

Harry nodded.

"What makes you think you'll find Iridel in Limbo?" sneered his captor. "Who are you, anyway?"

Harry had learned by this time. "I'm an—actor," he said in a small voice. "I got into Wednesday by mistake, and they sent me back here."

"What for?"

"Huh? Why— I guess it was a mistake, that's all."

The man stepped forward and grabbed Harry by the collar. He was about eight times as powerful as a hydraulic jack. "Don't give me no guff, pal," said the man. "Nobody gets sent to Limbo by mistake or if he didn't do somethin' up there to make him deserve it. Come clean, now."

"I didn't do nothin'," Harry wailed. "I asked them the way back,

and they showed me a door, and I went through it and came here. That's all I know. Stop it, you're choking me!"

The man dropped him suddenly. "Listen, babe, you know who I am? Hey?" Harry shook his head. "Oh—you don't. Well, I'm Gurrah!"

"Yeah?" Harry said, not being able to think of anything else at the moment.

Gurrah puffed out his chest and appeared to be waiting for something more from Harry. When nothing came, he walked up to the mechanic, breathed in his face. "Ain't scared, huh? Tough guy, huh? Never heard of Gurrah, supervisor of Limbo an' the roughest, toughest son of the devil from Incidence to Eternity, huh?"

Now, Harry was a peaceable man, but if there was anything he hated it was to have a stranger breathe his bad breath pugnaciously at him. Before he knew it had happened, Gurrah was sprawled eight feet away and Harry was standing alone rubbing his left knuckles—quite the more surprised of the two.

Gurrah sat up, feeling his face. "Why, you . . . you hit me!" he roared. He got up and came over to Harry. "You hit me!" he said softly, his voice slightly out of focus in amazement. Harry wished he hadn't —wished he was in bed or in Futura or dead or something. Gurrah reached out with a heavy fist and—patted him on the shoulder. "Hey," he said, suddenly friendly, "you're all right. Heh! Took a poke at me, didn't you? Be damned! First time in a month o' Mondays anyone ever made a pass at me. Last was a feller named Orton. I killed 'im." Harry paled.

Gurrah leaned back against the lumber pile. "Dam'f I didn't enjoy that, feller. Yeah. This is a heck of a job they palmed off on me, but what can you do? Breakin' down—breakin' down. No sooner get through one job, workin' top speed, drivin' the boys till they bleed, than they give you the devil for not bein' halfway through another job. You'd think I'd been in the business long enough to know what it was all about, after more than eight hundred an' twenty million acts, wouldn't you? Heh. Try to tell *them* that. Ship a load of doghouses up to Wednesday, sneakin' it past backstage nice as you please. They turn right around and call me up. 'What's the matter with you, Gurrah? Them doghouses is no good. We sent you a list o' worn-out items two acts ago. One o' the items was doghouses.

Snap out of it or we send someone back there who can read, an' put you on a toteline.' That's what I get—act in and act out. An' does it do any good to tell 'em that my aid got the message an' dropped dead before he got it to me? No. Uh-uh. If I say anything about that, they tell me to stop workin' 'em to death. If I do that, they kick because my shipments don't come in fast enough."

He paused for breath. Harry had a hunch that if he kept Gurrah in a good mood it might benefit him. He asked, "What's your job, anyway?"

"Job?" Gurrah howled. "Call this a job? Tearin' down the sets, shippin' what's good to the act after next, junkin' the rest?" He snorted.

Harry asked, "You mean they use the same props over again?"

"That's right. They don't last, though. Six, eight acts, maybe. Then they got to build new ones and weather them and knock 'em around to make 'em look as if they was used."

There was silence for a time. Gurrah, having got his bitterness off his chest for the first time in literally ages, was feeling pacified. Harry didn't know how to feel. He finally broke the ice. "Hey, Gurrah—How'm I goin' to get back into the play?"

"What's it to me? How'd you— Oh, that's right, you walked in from the control room, huh? That it?"

Harry nodded.

"An' how," growled Gurrah, "did you get into the control room?"

"Iridel brought me."

"Then what?"

"Well, I went to see the producer, and—"

"Th' *producer!* Holy— You mean you walked right in and—" Gurrah mopped his brow. "What'd he say?"

"Why—he said he guessed it wasn't my fault that I woke up in Wednesday. He said to tell Iridel to ship me back."

"An' Iridel threw you back to Monday." And Gurrah threw back his shaggy head and roared.

"What's so funny?" asked Harry, a little peeved.

"Iridel," said Gurrah. "Do you realize that I've been trying for fifty thousand acts or more to get something on that pretty ol' heel, and he drops you right in my lap. Pal, I can't thank you enough! He was supposed to send you back into the play, and instead o' that you wind up in yesterday! Why, I'll blackmail him till the end of time!"

He whirled exultantly, called to a group of bedraggled little men who were staggering under a cornerstone on their way to the junk yard. "Take it easy, boys!" he called. "I got ol' Iridel by the short hair. No more busted backs! No more snotty messages!"

Harry, a little amazed at all this, put in a timid word. "Hey— Gurrah. What about me?"

Gurrah turned. "You? Oh. *Tel-e-phone!*" At his shout two little workers a trifle less bedraggled than the rest trotted up. One hopped up and perched on Gurrah's right shoulder; the other draped himself over the left, with his head forward. Gurrah grabbed the latter by the neck, brought the man's head close, and shouted into his ear, "Give me Iridel!" There was a moment's wait, then the little man on his other shoulder spoke in Iridel's voice, into Gurrah's ear, "Well?"

"Hiyah, fancy pants!"

"Fancy— I beg your— Who is this?"

"It's Gurrah, you futuristic parasite. I got a couple things to tell you."

"Gurrah! How . . . *dare* you talk to me like that! I'll have you—"

"You'll have me in your job if I tell all I know. You're a wart on the nose of progress, Iridel."

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning of this is that you had instructions sent to you by the producer an' you muffed them. Had an actor there, didn't you? He saw the boss, didn't he? Told you he was to be sent right back, didn't he? Sent him right over to me instead of to the play, didn't you? You're slippin', Iridel. Gettin' old. Well, get off the wire. I'm callin' the boss right now."

"The boss? Oh—don't do that, old man. Look, let's talk this thing over. Ah . . . about that shipment of three-legged dogs I was wanting you to round up for me; I guess I can do without them. Any little favor I can do for you—"

"You'll damn well do, after this. You better, Goldilocks." Gurrah knocked the two small heads together, breaking the connection and probably the heads, and turned grinning to Harry. "You see," he explained, "that Iridel feller is a good supervisor but he's a stickler for detail. He sends people to Limbo for the silliest little mistakes. He never forgives anyone and he never forgets a slip. He's the cause of half the misery back here, with his hurry-up orders. Now things are gonna be different. The boss has wanted to give Iridel a dose of his

own medicine for a long time now, but Irrie never gave him a chance."

Harry said patiently, "About me getting back, now—"

"My fran'!" Gurrah bellowed. He delved into a pocket and pulled out a watch like Iridel's. "It's eleven-forty on Tuesday," he said. "We'll shoot you back there now. You'll have to dope out your own reasons for disappearing. Don't spill too much or a lot of people will suffer for it—you the most. Ready?"

Harry nodded; Gurrah swept out a hand and opened the curtain to nothingness. "You'll find yourself quite a ways from where you started," he said, "because you did a little moving around here. Go ahead."

"Thanks," said Harry.

Gurrah laughed. "Don't thank me, chum. You rate all the thanks! Hey—if, after you kick off, you don't make out so good up there, let them toss you over to me. You'll be treated good; you've my word on it. Beat it; luck!"

Holding his breath, Harry Wright stepped through the doorway.

He had to walk thirty blocks to the garage, and when he got there the boss was waiting for him.

"Where you been, Wright?"

"I—lost my way."

"Don't get wise. What do you think this is—vacation time? Get going on the spring job. It won't be finished now till tomorrow, I suppose."

Harry looked him straight in the eye and said, "Listen. It'll be finished tonight. I happen to know." And, still grinning, he went back into the garage and took out his tools.

William L. Bade

AMBITION

Mr. Bade here accepts travel to the future as a scientific commonplace, which is one of the best ways to deal with it. He does not have to concern himself too much with the mechanics of transporting his hero from Now to Then; he merely assumes that in the future such mechanics are as ordinary as the machinery that operates an elevator is today. And, granted that, he proceeds to tell a very real and moving story about a young man who wanted to go to the stars. . . .

THERE was a thump. Maitland stirred, came half awake, and opened his eyes. The room was dark except where a broad shaft of moonlight from the open window fell on the foot of his bed. Outside, the residential section of the Reservation slept silently under the pale illumination of the full moon. He guessed sleepily that it was about three o'clock.

What had he heard? He had a definite impression that the sound had come from within the room. It had sounded like someone stumbling into a chair, or—

Something moved in the darkness on the other side of the room. Maitland started to sit up, and it was as though a thousand volts had shorted his brain. . . .

This time, he awoke more normally. He opened his eyes, looked through the window at a section of azure sky, and listened to the singing of birds somewhere outside. A beautiful day. In the middle of the process of stretching his rested muscles, arms extended back, legs tensed, he froze, looking up—for the first time really seeing the ceiling. He turned his head, then rolled off the bed, wide awake.

This wasn't his room!

The lawn outside wasn't part of the Reservation! Where the labs and the shops should have been, there was deep prairie grass, then a green ocean pushed into waves by the breeze stretching to the horizon. This wasn't the California desert! Down the hill, where the liquid-oxygen plant ought to have been, a river wound across the scene, almost hidden beneath its leafy roof of huge, ancient trees.

Shock contracted Maitland's diaphragm and spread through his body. His breathing quickened. *Now* he remembered what had happened during the night, the sound in the darkness, the dimly seen figure, and then—what? Blackout . . .

Where was he? Who had brought him here? For what purpose?

He thought he knew the answer to the last of those questions. As a member of the original atomic-reaction-motor team, he possessed information that other military powers would very much like to obtain. It was absolutely incredible that anyone had managed to abduct him from the heavily guarded confines of the Reservation, yet someone had done it. How?

He pivoted to inspect the room.

Even before his eyes could take in the details, he had the impression that there was something wrong about it. To begin with, the style was unfamiliar. There were no straight lines or sharp corners anywhere. The walls were paneled in featureless blue plastic, and the doors were smooth surfaces of metal, half-ellipses, without knobs. The flowing lines of the chair and table, built apparently from an aluminum alloy, somehow gave the impression of arrested motion. Even after allowances were made for the outlandish design, something about the room still was not right.

His eyes returned to the doors, and he moved over to study the nearer one. As he had noticed, there was no knob, but at the right of this one, at about waist level, a push button projected out of the wall. He pressed it; the door slid aside and disappeared. Maitland glanced in at the disclosed bathroom, then went over to look at the other door.

There was no button beside this one, nor any other visible means of causing it to open.

Baffled, he turned again and looked at the large open window—and realized what it was that had made the room seem so queer.

It did not look like a jail cell. There were no bars. . . .

Striding across the room, he lunged forward to peer out and violently banged his forehead. He staggered back, grimacing with pain, then reached forward cautious fingers and discovered a hard sheet of stuff so transparent that he had not even suspected its presence. Not glass! Glass was never this clear or strong. A plastic, no doubt, but one he hadn't heard of. Security sometimes had disadvantages.

He looked out at the peaceful vista of river and prairie. The char-

acter of the sunlight seemed to indicate that it was afternoon. He became aware that he was hungry.

Where the devil could this place be? And—muscles tightened about his empty stomach—what was in store for him here?

He stood trembling, acutely conscious that he was afraid and helpless, until a flicker of motion at the bottom of the hill near the river drew his attention. Pressing his nose against the window, he strained his eyes to see what it was.

A man and a woman were coming toward him up the hill. Evidently they had been swimming, for each had a towel; the man's was hung around his neck, and the woman was still drying her bobbed black hair.

Maitland speculated on the possibility that this might be Sweden; he didn't know of any other country where public bathing at this time of year was customary. However, that prairie certainly didn't look Scandinavian. . . .

As they came closer, he saw that both of them had dark, uniform suntans and showed striking muscular development, like persons who had trained for years with weights. They vanished below his field of view, presumably into the building.

He sat down on the edge of the cot and glared helplessly at the floor.

About half an hour later, the door he couldn't open slid aside into the wall. The man Maitland had seen outside, now clad in gray trunks and sandals, stood across the threshold looking in at him. Maitland stood up and stared back, conscious suddenly that in his rumpled pajamas he made an unimpressive figure.

The fellow looked about forty-five. The first details Maitland noticed were the forehead, which was quite broad, and the calm, clear eyes. The dark hair, white at the temples, was combed back, still damp from swimming. Below, there was a wide mouth and a firm, rounded chin.

This man was intelligent, Maitland decided, and extremely sure of himself.

Somehow, the face didn't go with the rest of him. The man had the head of a thinker, the body of a trained athlete—an unusual combination.

Impassively, the man said, "My name is Swarts. You want to know where you are. I am not going to tell you." He had an accent—Eu-

ropean, but otherwise unidentifiable. Possibly German. Maitland opened his mouth to protest, but Swarts went on, "However, you're free to do all the guessing you want." Still there was no suggestion of a smile.

"Now, these are the rules. You'll be here for about a week. You'll have three meals a day, served in this room. You will not be allowed to leave it except when accompanied by myself. You will not be harmed in any way, provided you cooperate. And you can forget the silly idea that we want your childish secrets about rocket motors." Maitland's heart jumped. "My reason for bringing you here is altogether different. I want to give you some psychological tests. . . ."

"Are you crazy?" Maitland asked quietly. "Do you realize that at this moment one of the greatest hunts in history must be going on? I'll admit I'm baffled as to where we are and how you got me here—but it seems to me that you could have found someone less conspicuous to give your tests to."

Briefly, then, Swarts did smile. "They won't find you," he said. "Now, come with me."

After that outlandish cell, Swarts's laboratory looked rather commonplace. There was something like a surgical cot in the center, and a bench along one wall supported several electronics cabinets. A couple of them had cathode-ray tube screens, and they all presented a normal complement of meters, pilot lights, and switches. Cables from them ran across the ceiling and came to a focus above the high, flat cot in the center of the room.

"Lie down," Swarts said. When Maitland hesitated, Swarts added, "Understand one thing—the more you cooperate, the easier things will be for you. If necessary, I will use coercion. I can get all my results against your will, if I must. I would prefer not to. Please don't make me."

"What's the idea?" Maitland asked. "What is all this?"

Swarts hesitated, though not, Maitland astonishedly felt, to evade an answer, but to find the proper words. "You can think of it as a lie detector. These instruments will record your reactions to the tests I give you. That is as much as you need to know. Now lie down."

Maitland stood there for a moment, deliberately relaxing his tensed muscles. "Make me."

If Swarts was irritated, he didn't show it. "That was the first test," he said. "Let me put it another way. I would appreciate it a lot if you'd lie down on this cot. I would like to test my apparatus."

Maitland shook his head stubbornly.

"I see," Swarts said. "You want to find out what you're up against."

He moved so fast that Maitland couldn't block the blow. It was to the solar plexus, just hard enough to double him up, fighting for breath. He felt an arm under his back, another behind his knees. Then he was on the cot. When he was able to breathe again, there were straps across his chest, hips, knees, ankles, and arms, and Swarts was tightening a clamp that held his head immovable.

Presently, a number of tiny electrodes were adhering to his temples and to other portions of his body, and a minute microphone was clinging to the skin over his heart. These devices terminated in cables that hung from the ceiling. A sphygmomanometer sleeve was wrapped tightly around his left upper arm, its rubber tube trailing to a small black box clamped to the frame of the cot. Another cable left the box and joined the others.

So—Maitland thought—Swarts could record changes in his skin potential, heartbeat, and blood pressure: the involuntary responses of the body to stimuli.

The question was, what were the stimuli to be?

"Your name," said Swarts, "is Robert Lee Maitland. You are thirty-four years old. You are an engineer, specialty heat transfer, particularly as applied to rocket motors. . . . No, Mr. Maitland. I'm not going to question you about your work; just forget about it. Your home town is Madison, Wisconsin. . . ."

"You seem to know everything about me," Maitland said defiantly, looking up into the hanging forest of cabling. "Why this recital?"

"I do not know everything about you—yet. And I'm testing the equipment, calibrating it to your reactions." He went on, "Your favorite recreations are chess and reading what you term 'science fiction.' Maitland, *how would you like to go to the moon?"*

Something eager leaped in Maitland's breast at the abrupt question, and he tried to turn his head. Then he forced himself to relax. "What do you mean?"

Swarts was chuckling. "I really hit a semantic push button there, didn't I? Maitland, I brought you here because you're a man who wants to go to the moon. I'm interested in finding out *why."*

In the evening a girl brought Maitland his meal. As the door slid aside, he automatically stood up, and they stared at each other for several seconds.

She had the high cheekbones and almond eyes of an Oriental, skin that glowed like gold in the evening light, yet thick coiled braids of blond hair that glittered like polished brass. Shorts and a sleeveless blouse of some thick, reddish, metallic-looking fabric clung to her body, and over that she was wearing a light, ankle-length cloak of what seemed to be white wool.

She was looking at him with palpable curiosity and something like expectancy. Maitland sighed and said, "Hello," then glanced down self-consciously at his wrinkled green pajamas.

She smiled, put the tray of food on the table, and swept out, her cloak billowing behind her. Maitland remained standing, staring at the closed door for a minute after she was gone.

Later, when he had finished the steak and corn on the cob and shredded carrots, and a feeling of warm well-being was diffusing from his stomach to his extremities, he sat down on the bed to watch the sunset and to think.

There were three questions for which he required answers before he could formulate any plan or policy.

Where was he?

Who was Swarts?

What was the purpose of the "tests" he was being given?

It was possible, of course, that this was all an elaborate scheme for getting military secrets, despite Swarts's protestations to the contrary. Maitland frowned. This place certainly didn't have the appearance of a military establishment, and so far there had been nothing to suggest the kind of interrogation to be expected from foreign intelligence officers.

It might be better to tackle the first question first. He looked at the sun, a red spheroid already half below the horizon, and tried to think of a region that had this kind of terrain. That prairie out there was unique. Almost anywhere in the world, land like that would be cultivated, not allowed to go to grass.

This might be somewhere in Africa. . . .

He shook his head, puzzled. The sun disappeared, and its blood-hued glow began to fade from the sky. Maitland sat there, trying to get hold of the problem from an angle where it wouldn't just slip away.

After a while the western sky became a screen of clear, luminous blue, a backdrop for a pure white brilliant star. As always at that sight, Maitland felt his worry drain away, leaving an almost mystical sense of peace and an undefinable longing.

Venus, the most beautiful of the planets.

Maitland kept track of them all in their majestic paths through the constellations, but Venus was his favorite. Time and time again he had watched its steady climb higher and higher in the western sky, its transient rule there as evening star, its progression toward the horizon, and loved it equally in its *alter ego* of morning star. Venus was an old friend. An old friend . . .

Something icy settled on the back of his neck, ran down his spine, and diffused into his body. He stared at the planet unbelievingly, fists clenched, forgetting to breathe.

Last night Venus hadn't been there.

Venus was a morning star just now. . . .

Just now!

He realized the truth in that moment.

Later, when that jewel of a planet had set and the stars were out, he lay on the bed, still warm with excitement and relief. He didn't have to worry any more about military secrets or who Swarts was. Those questions were irrelevant now. And now he could accept the psychological tests at their face value; most likely, they were what they purported to be.

Only one question of importance remained: What year was this?

He grimaced in the darkness, an involuntary muscular expression of jubilation and excitement. The *future!* Here was the opportunity for the greatest adventure imaginable to twentieth-century man.

Somewhere out there under the stars there must be grand glittering cities and busy spaceports, roaring gateways to the planets. Somewhere out there in the night there must be men who had walked beside the Martian canals and pierced the shining cloud mantle of Venus—somewhere, perhaps, men who had visited the distant, luring stars and returned. Surely, a civilization that had developed time travel could reach the stars!

And *he* had a chance to become a part of all that! He could spend his life among the planets, a citizen of deep space, a voyager of the challenging spaceways between the solar worlds.

"I'm adaptable," he told himself gleefully. "I can learn fast. There'll be a job for me out there. . . ."

If—

Suddenly sobered, he rolled over and put his feet on the floor, sat in the darkness, thinking. Tomorrow. Tomorrow he would have to find a way of breaking down Swarts's reticence. He would have to make the man realize that secrecy wasn't necessary in this case. And if Swarts still wouldn't talk, he would have to find a way of forcing the issue. The fellow had said that he didn't need cooperation to get his results, but—

After a while Maitland smiled to himself and went back to bed.

He woke in the morning with someone gently shaking his shoulder. He rolled over and looked up at the girl who had brought him his meal the evening before. There was a tray on the table, and he sniffed the smell of bacon. The girl smiled at him. She was dressed as before, except that she had discarded the white cloak.

As he swung his legs to the floor, she started toward the door, carrying the tray with the dirty dishes from yesterday. He stopped her with the word, "Miss!"

She turned, and he thought there was something eager in her face.

"Miss, do you speak my language?"

"Yes," hesitantly. She lingered too long on the hiss of the last consonant.

"Miss," he asked, watching her face intently, "what year is this?"

Startlingly, she laughed, a mellow peal of mirth that had nothing forced about it. She turned toward the door again and said over her shoulder, "You will have to ask Swarts about that. I cannot tell you."

"Wait! You mean you don't know?"

She shook her head. "I cannot tell you."

"All right; we'll let it go at that."

She grinned at him again as the door slid shut.

Swarts came half an hour later, and Maitland began his planned offensive.

"What year is this?"

Swarts's steely eyes locked with his. "You know what the date is," he stated.

"No, I don't. Not since yesterday."

"Come on," Swarts said patiently, "let's get going. We have a lot to get through this morning."

"I *know* this isn't 1950. It's probably not even the twentieth century. Venus was a morning star before you brought me here. Now it's an evening star."

"Never mind that. Come."

Wordlessly, Maitland climbed to his feet, preceded Swarts to the laboratory, lay down, and allowed him to fasten the straps and attach the instruments, making no resistance at all. When Swarts started saying a list of words—doubtlessly some sort of semantic reaction test—Maitland began the job of integrating $csc^3x\ dx$ in his head. It was a calculation which required great concentration and frequent tracing back of steps. After several minutes he noticed that Swarts had stopped calling words. He opened his eyes to find the other man standing over him, looking somewhat exasperated and a little baffled.

"What year is this?" Maitland asked in a conversational tone.

"We'll try another series of tests."

It took Swarts nearly twenty minutes to set up the new apparatus. He lowered a bulky affair with two cylindrical tubes like the twin stacks of a binocular microscope over Maitland's head, so that the lenses at the ends of the tubes were about half an inch from the engineer's eyes. He attached tiny clamps to Maitland's eyelashes.

"These will keep you from holding your eyes shut," he said. "You can blink, but the springs are too strong for you to hold your eyelids down against the tension."

He inserted button earphones into Maitland's ears—

And then the show began.

He was looking at a door in a partly darkened room, and there were footsteps outside, a peremptory knocking. The door flew open, and outlined against the light of the hall he saw a man with a twelve-gauge shotgun. The man shouted, "Now I've got you, you wife stealer!" He swung the shotgun around and pulled the trigger. There was a terrible blast of sound and the flash of smokeless powder—then blackness.

With a deliberate effort Maitland unclenched his fists and tried to slow his breathing. Some kind of emotional reaction test—what was the countermove? He closed his eyes, but shortly the muscles around them declared excruciatingly that they couldn't keep that up.

Now he was looking at a girl. She . . .

Maitland gritted his teeth and fought to use his brain; then he had it.

He thought of a fat slob of a bully who had beaten him up one day after school. He remembered a talk he had heard by a politician who had all the intelligent social responsibility of a rogue gorilla, but no more. He brooded over the damnable stupidity and shortsightedness of Swarts in standing by his silly rules and not telling him about this new world.

Within a minute he was in an ungovernable rage. His muscles tightened against the restraining straps. He panted, sweat came out on his forehead, and he began to curse. Swarts! How he hated . . .

The scene was suddenly a flock of sheep spread over a green hillside. There was blood hammering in Maitland's temples. His face felt hot and swollen, and he writhed against the restraint of the straps.

The scene disappeared, the lenses of the projector retreated from his eyes, and Swarts was standing over him, white-lipped. Maitland swore at him for a few seconds, then relaxed and smiled weakly. His head was starting to ache from the effort of blinking.

"What year is this?" he asked.

"All right," Swarts said. "A.D. 2634."

Maitland's smile became a grin.

"I really haven't the time to waste talking irrelevancies," Swarts said a while later. "Honestly, Maitland, I'm working against a time limit. If you'll cooperate, I'll tell Ching to answer your questions."

"Ching?"

"Ingrid Ching is the girl who has been bringing you your meals."

Maitland considered a moment, then nodded. Swarts lowered the projector to his eyes again, and this time the engineer did not resist.

That evening he could hardly wait for her to come. Too excited to sit and watch the sunset, he paced interminably about the room, sometimes whistling nervously, snapping his fingers, sitting down and jittering one leg. After a while he noticed that he was whistling the same theme over and over; a minute's thought identified it as that exuberant mounting phrase which recurs in the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony.*

He forgot about it and went on whistling. He was picturing himself aboard a ship dropping in toward Mars, making planetfall at Syrtis Major; he was seeing visions of Venus and the awesome beauty of Saturn. In his mind, he circled the moon and viewed the earth as a huge, bright globe against the constellations. . . .

Finally the door slid aside and she appeared, carrying the usual tray of food. She smiled at him, making dimples in her golden skin and revealing a perfect set of teeth, and put the tray on the table.

"I think you are wonderful," she laughed. "You get everything you want, even from Swarts, and I have not been able to get even a little of what I want from him. I want to travel in time, go back to your twentieth century. And I wanted to talk with you, and he would not let me." She laughed again, hands on her rounded hips. "I have never seen him so irritated as he was this noon."

Maitland urged her into the chair and sat down on the edge of the bed. Eagerly he asked, "Why the devil do you want to go to the twentieth century? Believe me, I've been there, and what I've seen of this world looks a lot better."

She shrugged. "Swarts says that I want to go back to the Dark Age of Technology because I have not adapted well to modern culture. Myself, I think I just have a romantic nature. Far times and places look more exciting. . . ."

"How do you mean—" Maitland wrinkled his brow—"adapt to modern culture? Don't tell me *you're* from another time!"

"Oh, no! But my home is Aresund, a little fishing village at the head of a fiord in what you would call Norway. So far north, we are much behind the times. We live in the old way, from the sea, speak the old tongue."

He looked at her golden features, such a felicitous blend of Oriental and European characteristics, and hesitantly asked, "Maybe I shouldn't . . . This is a little personal, but . . . you don't look altogether like the Norwegians of my time."

His fear that she would be offended proved to be completely unjustified. She merely laughed and said, "There has been much history since 1950. Five hundred years ago, Europe was overrun by Pan-Orientals. Today you could not find anywhere a 'pure' European or Asiatic." She giggled. "Swarts's ancestors from your time must be cursing in their graves. His family is Afrikander all the way back, but one of his great-grandfathers was pure-blooded Bantu. His full name is Lassisi Swarts."

Maitland wrinkled his brow. "Afrikander?"

"The South Africans." Something strange came into her eyes. It might have been awe or even hatred; he could not tell. "The Pan-Orientals eventually conquered all the world except for North America—

the last remnant of the American World Empire—and southern Africa. The Afrikanders had been partly isolated for several centuries then, and they had developed technology while the rest of the world lost it. They had a tradition of white supremacy, and in addition they were terrified of being encircled." She sighed. "They ruled the next world empire, and it was founded on the slaughter of one and a half-billion human beings. That went into the history books as the War of Annihilation."

"So many? How?"

"They were clever with machines, the Afrikanders. They made armies of them—armies of invincible killing machines, produced in robot factories from robot-minded ores. . . . Very clever." She gave a little shudder.

"And yet they founded modern civilization," she added. "The grandsons of the technicians who built the machine army set up our robot production system, and today no human being has to dirty his hands raising food or manufacturing things. It could never have been done, either, before the population was . . . reduced . . . to three hundred million."

"Then the Afrikanders are still on top? Still the masters?"

She shook her head. "There are no more Afrikanders."

"Rebellion?"

"No. Intermarriage. Racial blending. There was a psychology of guilt behind it. So huge a crime eventually required a proportionate expiation. Afrikaans is still the world language, but there is only one race now. No more masters or slaves."

They were both silent for a moment, and then she sighed. "Let us not talk about them any more."

"Robot factories and farms," Maitland mused. "What else? What means of transportation? Do you have interstellar flight yet?"

"Inter-what?"

"Have men visited the stars?"

She shook her head, bewildered.

"I always thought that would be a tough problem to crack," he agreed. "But tell me about what men are doing in the solar system. How is life on Mars and Venus, and how long does it take to get to those places?"

He waited, expectantly silent, but she only looked puzzled. "I don't understand. Mars? What are Mars?"

After several seconds, Maitland swallowed. Something seemed to be the matter with his throat, making it difficult for him to speak. "Surely you have space travel?"

She frowned and shook her head. "What does that mean—space travel?"

He was gripping the edge of the bed now, glaring at her. "A civilization that could discover time travel and build robot factories wouldn't find it hard to send a ship to Mars!"

"A *ship?* Oh, you mean something like a *vliegvlotter.* Why, no, I don't suppose it would be hard. But why would anyone want to do a thing like that?"

He was on his feet, towering over her, fists clenched. She raised her arms as if to shield her face if he should hit her. "Let's get this perfectly clear," he said, more harshly than he realized. "So far as you know, no one has ever visited the planets and no one wants to. Is that right?"

She nodded apprehensively. "I have never heard of its being done."

He sank down on the bed and put his face in his hands. After a while he looked up and said bitterly, "You're looking at a man who would give his life to get to Mars. I thought I would in my time. I was positive I would when I knew I was in your time. And now I know I never will."

The cot creaked beside him, and he felt a soft arm about his shoulders and fingers delicately stroking his brow. Presently he opened his eyes and looked at her. "I just don't understand," he said. "It seemed obvious to me that whenever men were able to reach the planets, they'd do it."

Her pitying eyes were on his face. He hitched himself around so that he was facing her. "I've got to understand. I've got to know *why.* What happened? Why don't men want the planets any more?"

"Honestly," she said, "I did not know they ever had." She hesitated. "Maybe you are asking the wrong question."

He furrowed his brow, bewildered now by her.

"I mean," she explained, "maybe you should ask why people in the twentieth century *did* want to go to worlds men are not suited to inhabit."

Maitland felt his face become hot. "Men can go anywhere, if they want to bad enough."

"But *why?*"

Despite his sudden irrational anger toward her, Maitland tried to stick to logic. "Living space, for one thing. The only permanent solution to the population problem . . ."

"We have no population problem. A hundred years ago, we realized that the key to social stability is a limited population. Our economic system was built to take care of three hundred million people, and we have held the number at that."

"Birth control," Maitland scoffed. "How do you make it work—secret police?"

"No. Education. Each of us has the right to two children, and we cherish that right so much that we make every effort to see that those two are the best children we could possibly produce. . . ."

She broke off, looking a little self-conscious. "You understand, what I have been saying applies to *most* of the world. In some places like Aresund, things are different. Backward. I still do not feel that I belong here, although the people of the town have accepted me as one of them."

"Even," he said, "granting that you have solved the population problem, there's still the adventure of the thing. Surely, somewhere there must be men who still feel that. . . . Ingrid, doesn't it fire something in your blood, the idea of going to Mars—just to go there and see what's there and walk under a new sky and a smaller sun? Aren't you interested in finding out what the canals are? Or what's under the clouds of Venus? Wouldn't you like to see the rings of Saturn from a distance of only two hundred thousand miles?" His hands were trembling as he stopped.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Go into the past—yes! But go out there? I still cannot see why."

"Has the spirit of adventure *evaporated* from the human race, or what?"

She smiled. "In a room downstairs there is the head of a lion. Swarts killed the beast when he was a young man. He used a spear. And time traveling is the greatest adventure there is. At least, that is the way I feel. Listen, Bob." She laid a hand on his arm. "You grew up in the Age of Technology. Everybody was terribly excited about what could be done with machines—machines to blow up a city all at once, or fly around the world, or take a man to Mars. We have had our fill of—what is the word?—gadgets. Our machines serve us, and so long as they function right, we are satisfied to forget about them.

"Because this is the Age of *Man*. We are terribly interested in what can be done with people. Our scientists, like Swarts, are studying human rather than nuclear reactions. We are much more fascinated by the life and death of cultures than by the expansion or contraction of the universe. With us, it is the people that are important, not gadgets."

Maitland stared at her, his face blank. His mind had just manufactured a discouraging analogy. His present position was like that of an earnest twelfth century crusader deposited by some freak of nature into the year 1950, trying to find a way of reanimating the anti-Mohammedan movement. What chance would he have? The unfortunate knight would argue in vain that the atomic bomb offered a means of finally destroying the infidel. . . .

Maitland looked up at the girl, who was regarding him silently with troubled eyes. "I think I'd like to be alone for a while," he said.

In the morning, Maitland was tired, though not particularly depressed. He hadn't slept much, but he had come to a decision. When Ingrid woke him, he gave her a cavalier smile and a cheery "Good morning" and sat down to the eggs and ham she had brought. Then, before she could leave, he asked, "Last night when we were talking about spaceships, you mentioned some kind of vessel or vehicle. What was it?"

She thought. *"Vliegvlotter?* Was that it?"

He nodded emphatically. "Tell me about them."

"Well, they are—cars, you might say, with wheels that go into the body when you take off. They can do, oh, five thousand miles an hour in the ionosphere, fifty miles up."

"Fifty miles," Maitland mused. "Then they're sealed tight, so the air doesn't leak out?" Ingrid nodded. "How do they work? Rocket drive?"

"No." She plucked at her lower lip. "I do not understand it very well. You could picture something that hooks into a gravity field, and pulls. A long way from the earth it would not work very well because the field is so thin there. . . . I guess I just cannot explain it very well to you."

"That's all I need." Maitland licked his lips and frowned. "On that point, anyway. Another thing—Swarts told me I'd be here for about a week. Is there any set procedure involved in that? Have other persons been brought to this period from the past?"

She laughed. "Thousands. Swarts has published nearly a hundred case studies himself, and spent years in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

Maitland interrupted incredulously. "How on earth could he ever manage to keep that many disappearances quiet? Some of those people would be bound to talk."

She shook her head definitely. "The technique was designed to avoid just that. There is a method of 'fading' the memories people have of their stay here. The episode is always accepted as a period of amnesia, in the absence of a better explanation."

"Still, in thousands of cases . . ."

"Spread out over centuries in a total population of billions."

He laughed. "You're right. But will that be done to me?"

"I suppose so. I can't imagine Swarts letting you take your memories back with you."

Maitland looked out the window at the green horizon. "We'll see," he said.

Maitland removed his three-day beard with an effective depilatory cream he discovered in the bathroom, and settled down to wait. When Swarts arrived, the engineer said quietly, "Sit down, please. I have to talk with you."

Swarts gave him the look of a man with a piece of equipment that just won't function right, and remained standing. "What is it now?"

"Look," Maitland said, "Ingrid has told me that men never reached the planets. *You* ought to know how I feel about space flight. It's my whole life. Knowing that my work on rockets is going to pay off only in the delivery of bombs, I don't want to go back to the twentieth century. I want to stay here."

Swarts said slowly, "That's impossible."

"Now, look, if you want me to cooperate . . ."

The big man made an impatient gesture. "Not impossible because of me. Physically impossible. Impossible because of the way time travel works."

Maitland stared at him suspiciously.

"To displace a mass from its proper time takes energy," Swarts explained, "and it's one of the oldest general physical principles that higher energy states are unstable with respect to lower ones. Are you familiar with elementary quantum theory? As an analogy, you might

regard yourself, displaced from your proper time, as an atom in an excited state. The system is bound to drop back to ground state. In the atomic case, the time which elapses before that transition occurs is a matter of probabilities. In the case of time travel, it just depends on the amount of mass and the number of years the mass is displaced.

"In short, the laws of nature will insist on your returning to 1950 in just a few days."

Maitland looked at the floor for a while, and his shoulders sagged. "Your memories of this will be faded," Swarts said. "You'll forget about what Ingrid has told you—forget you were ever here, and take up your life where you left off. You were happy working on rockets, weren't you?"

"But—" Maitland shook his head despairingly. Then he had an idea. "Will you let me do one thing before I go back? I realize now that our time is limited, and you have a lot of tests to give me, but I'm willing to help speed things up. I want to see the stars, just once, from deep space. I know you'll make me forget it ever happened, but once in my life . . . You have vessels—*vliegvlotter,* Ingrid called them—that can go into space. If you'd give me just a couple days to go out there, maybe circle the moon . . . ?" There was a pleading note in his voice, but he didn't care.

Swarts regarded him dispassionately for a moment, then nodded. "Sure," he said. "Now let's get to work."

"The earth doesn't change much," Maitland mused. Sitting on the cot, his arm around Ingrid's yielding waist, he was wearing the new blue trunks she had given him to replace his rumpled pajamas. The room was full of evening sunlight, and in that illumination she was more beautiful than any other woman he could remember. This had been the last day of tests; tomorrow, Swarts had promised, he would begin his heartbreakingly brief argosy to the moon, with Ingrid as pilot.

Over the past four days he had been with the girl a lot. In the beginning, he realized, she had been drawn to him as a symbol of an era she longed, but was unable, to visit. Now she understood him better, knew more about him—and Maitland felt that now she liked him for himself.

She had told him of her childhood in backward Aresund and of loneliness here at the school in Nebraska. "Here," she had said, "par-

ents spend most of their time raising their children; at home, they just let us grow. Every time one of these people looks at me I feel inferior."

She had confided her dream of visiting far times and places, then had finished, "I doubt that Swarts will ever let me go back. He thinks I am too irresponsible. Probably he is right. But it is terribly discouraging. Sometimes I think the best thing for me would be to go home to the fiord. . . ."

Now, sitting in the sunset glow, Maitland was in a philosophic mood. "The color of grass, the twilight, the seasons, the stars—those things haven't changed." He gestured out the window at the slumbering evening prairie. "That scene, save for unessentials, could just as well be 1950—or 950. It's only human institutions that change rapidly. . . ."

"I'll be awfully sorry when you go back," she sighed. "You're the first person I've met here that I can talk to."

"Talk to," he repeated, dissatisfied. "You're just about the finest girl I've ever met."

He kissed her playfully, but when they separated there was nothing playful about it. Her face was flushed and he was breathing faster than he had been. Savagely, he bit the inside of his cheek. "Two days! A lifetime here wouldn't be long enough!"

"Bob." she touched his arm and her lips were trembling. "Bob, do you have to go—out there? We could get a couple of horses tomorrow, and we would have two days."

He leaned back and shook his head. "Can't you see, Ingrid? This is my only chance. If I don't go tomorrow, I'll never get to the moon. And then my whole life won't mean anything. . . ."

He woke with Ingrid shaking him. "Bob! Bob!" Her voice was an urgent whisper. "You've got to wake up quick! Bob!"

He sat up and brushed the hair out of his eyes. "What's the matter?"

"I didn't really believe that Swarts would let you go into space. It wasn't like him. Bob, he fooled you. *Today* is when your time runs out!"

Maitland swallowed hard, and his chest muscles tightened convulsively. "You mean it was all a trick?"

She nodded. "He told me just now, while he was putting something in your milk to make you sleep." Her face was bitter and resentful. "He said, 'This is a lesson for you, Ching, if you ever do any work with in-

dividuals like this. You have to humor them, tell them anything they want to believe, in order to get your data.' "

Maitland put his feet on the floor and stood up. His face was white and he was breathing fast.

She grasped his arm. "What are you going to do?"

He shook her hand off. "I may not get to the moon, but I'm going to teach one superman the advantage of honesty!"

"Wait! That won't get you anywhere."

"He may be bigger than I am," Maitland gritted, "but—"

She squeezed his arm violently. "You don't understand. He would not fight you. He'd use a gun."

"If I could catch him by surprise . . ."

She took hold of his shoulders firmly. "Now, listen, Bob Maitland. I love you. And I think it's the most important thing in the world that you get to see the stars. Swarts will never let me time travel, anyway."

"What are you thinking?"

"I'll go down to the village and get a *vliegvlotter*. It won't take twenty minutes. I'll come back, see that Swarts is out of the way, let you out of here, and take you—" she hesitated, but her eyes were steady—"wherever you want to go."

He was trembling. "Your career. I can't let you . . ."

She said, "Pfui," then grinned. "My career! It's time I went home to the fiord, anyway. Now you wait here!"

The *vliegvlotter* was about fifty feet long, an ellipsoid of revolution. Maitland and Ingrid ran hand in hand across the lawn, and she pushed him up through the door, then slammed it shut and screwed the pressure locks tight.

They were strapping themselves into the seats, bathed in sunlight that flooded down through the thick plastic canopy, when she stopped, pale with consternation.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Oh, Bob, I forgot! We can't do this!"

"We're going to," he said grimly.

"Bob, *sometime this morning you're going to snap back to 1950*. If that happens while we're up there . . ."

His jaw went slack as the implication soaked in. Then he reached over and finished fastening the buckle on her wide seat belt.

"Bob, I can't. I would be killing you just as surely as . . ."

"Never mind that. You can tell me how to run this thing and then get out, if you want to."

She reached slowly forward and threw a switch, took hold of the wheel. Seconds later they were plummeting into the blue dome of the sky.

The blue became darker, purplish, and stars appeared in daylight. Maitland gripped the edge of the seat; somewhere inside him it seemed that a chorus of angels was singing the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth.*

There was a *ping,* and Ingrid automatically flicked a switch. A screen lit up and the image of Swarts was looking at them. His eyes betrayed some unfamiliar emotion, awe or fear. "Ching! Come back here at once. Don't you realize that—"

"Sorry, Swarts." Maitland's voice resonated with triumph. "You'll just have to humor me once more."

"Maitland! Don't you know that you're going to snap back to the twentieth century in half an hour? You'll be in space with no protection. You'll explode!"

"I know," Maitland said. He looked up through the viewport. "Right now I'm seeing the stars as I've never seen them before. Sorry to make you lose a case, Swarts, but this is better than dying of pneumonia or an atomic bomb."

He reached forward and snapped the image off.

Twenty minutes later, Maitland had Ingrid cut the drive and turn the ship so that he could see the earth. It was there, a huge shining globe against the constellations, ten thousand miles distant, one hundred times the size of familiar Luna. North America was directly below, part of Canada covered with a dazzling area of clouds. The polar icecap was visible in its entirety, along with the northern portions of the Eurasian land mass. The line of darkness cut off part of Alaska and bisected the Pacific Ocean, and the sun's reflection in the Atlantic was blinding.

And there was Venus, a brilliant white jewel against the starry blackness of interstellar space; and now he could see the sun's corona. . . .

The ship was rotating slowly, and presently the moon, at first quarter, came into view, not perceptibly larger than seen from earth. Maitland heaved a sigh of regret. If only this could have been but the beginning of a voyage. . . .

Ingrid touched his arm. "Bob."

He turned to look at her golden beauty.

"Bob, give me one more kiss."

He loosened his seat strap and put his arms around her. For a moment he felt her soft lips on his . . .

Then she was gone, and the ship had vanished. For perhaps as long as a second, alone in space, he was looking with naked, unprotected, ambition-sated eyes at the distant stars.

The luring white blaze of Venus was the last image he took with him into the night without stars.

Murray Leinster

THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK AFTER NEXT

In this tale we meet our first Mad Scientist. Just as in reality the thoroughly cracked pots used to be found inventing perpetual-motion machines, so in science fiction we find the lunatic fringe more often than not trying to perfect time-travel mechanisms.

Of course, Mr. Binder is not really mad; he is just a bit unlikely. And the results of his experiments are unlikelier yet, but you come to look for that sort of thing with pleased anticipation when you read time-travel stories.

Don't write in asking Mr. Leinster where the people in his story were when they weren't here. He could tell you, but you wouldn't understand, any more than Mr. McFadden did, or I did.

IT CAN be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is again puttering happily around the workshop he calls his laboratory, engaged again upon something that he—alone—calls philosophic-scientific research. He is a very nice, little, pink-cheeked person, Mr. Binder—but maybe somebody ought to stop him.

Mr. Steems could be asked for an opinion. If the matter of Mr. Binder's last triumph is mentioned in Mr. Steems's hearing, he will begin to speak, rapidly and with emotion. His speech will grow impassioned; his tone will grow shrill and hoarse at the same time; and presently he will foam at the mouth. This occurs though he is not aware that he ever met Mr. Binder in person, and though the word "compenetrability" has never fallen upon his ears. It occurs because Mr. Steems is sensitive. He still resents it that the newspapers described him as the Taxi Monster—a mass murderer exceeding even M. Landru in the number of his victims. There is also the matter of Miss Susie Blepp, to whom Mr. Steems was affianced at the time, and there is the matter of Patrolman Cassidy, whose love life was rearranged. Mr. Steems's reaction is violent. But the background of the episode was completely innocent. It was even chastely intellectual.

The background was Mr. Thaddeus Binder. He is a plump little man of sixty-four, retired on pension from the Maintenance Department of the local electric light and power company. He makes a hobby

of a line of research that seems to have been neglected. Since his retirement, Mr. Binder has read widely and deeply, quaffing the wisdom of men like Kant, Leibnitz, Maritain, Einstein, and Judge Rutherford. He absorbs philosophical notions from those great minds and then tries to apply them practically at his workbench. He does not realize his success. Definitely!

Mr. Steems drove a taxicab in which Mr. Binder rode just after one such experiment. The whole affair sprang from that fact. Mr. Binder had come upon the philosophical concept of compenetrability. It is the abstract thought that—all experience to the contrary notwithstanding—two things might manage to be in the same place at the same time. Mr. Binder decided that it might be true. He experimented. In Maintenance, before his retirement, he had answered many calls in the emergency truck, and he knew some things that electricity on the loose can do. He knows some other things that he doesn't believe yet. In any case, he used this background of factual data in grappling with a philosophical concept. He made a device. He tried it. He was delighted with the results. He then set out to show it to his friend Mr. McFadden.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon of May 3, 1951. Mr. Binder reached the corner of Bliss and Kelvin Streets, near his home. He had a paper-wrapped parcel under his arm. He saw Mr. Steems's cab parked by the curb. He approached and gave the address of his friend Mr. McFadden, on Monroe Avenue. Mr. Steems looked at him sourly. Mr. Binder got into the cab and repeated the address. Mr. Steems snapped, "I got it the first time!" He pulled out into the traffic, scowling. Everything was normal.

Mr. Binder settled back blissfully. The inside of the cab was dingy and worn, but he did not notice. The seat cushion was so badly frayed that there was one place where a spring might stab through at any instant. But Mr. Binder beamed to himself. He had won an argument with his friend Mr. McFadden. He had proof of his correctness. It was the paper parcel on his lap.

The cab passed Vernon Street. It went by Dupuy Street. Mr. Binder chuckled to himself. In his reading, the idea of compenetrability had turned up with a logical argument for its possibility that Mr. Binder considered hot stuff. He had repeated that argument to Mr. McFadden, who tended to skepticism. Mr. McFadden had said it was nonsense.

Mr. Binder insisted that it was a triumph of inductive reasoning. Mr. McFadden snorted. Mr. Binder said, "All right, I'll prove it!" Now he was on the way to do so.

His reading of abstruse philosophy had brought him happiness. He gloated as he rode behind Mr. Steems. He even untied his parcel to admire the evidence all over again. It was a large, thin, irregularly shaped piece of soft leather, supposedly a deerskin. It had been a throw on the parlor settee, and had had a picture of Hiawatha and Minnehaha on it. The picture was long gone, now, and the whole thing was about right to wash a car with; but Mr. Binder regarded it very happily. It was his proof that compenetrability was possible.

Another cab eeled in before Mr. Steems, forcing him to stop or collide. Mr. Steems jammed on his brakes, howling with wrath. The brakes screamed, the wheels locked, and Mr. Binder slid forward off his seat. Mr. Steems hurled invective at the other driver. In turn, he received invective. They achieved heights of eloquence which soothed their separate ires. Mr. Steems turned proudly to Mr. Binder.

"That told him off, huh?"

Mr. Binder did not answer. He was not there. The back of the cab was empty. It was as if Mr. Binder had evaporated.

Mr. Steems fumed. He turned off abruptly into a side street, stopped his cab, and investigated. Mr. Binder was utterly gone. A large patch of deerskin lay on the floor. On the deerskin there was an unusual collection of small objects. Mr. Steems found:

1 gold watch, monogrammed THB, still running
$.87 in silver, nickel, and copper coins
1 pocketknife
12 eyelets of metal, suitable for shoes
1 pair spectacles in metal case
1 nickel-plated ring, which would fit on a tobacco pipe
147 small bits of metal, looking like zipper teeth
1 key ring, with keys
1 metal shoelace tip
1 belt buckle, minus belt

Mr. Steems swore violently. "Smart guy, huh!" he said wrathfully. "Gettin' a free ride! He outsmarted himself, he did! Let 'im try to get this watch back! I never seen him!"

He pocketed the watch and money. The other objects he cast contemptuously away. He was about to heave out the deerhide when he remembered that Miss Susie Blepp had made disparaging remarks about the condition of his cab. So had her mother, while grafting deadhead cab rides as Mr. Steems's prospective mother-in-law. Mr. Steems said, "The hell with her!" But then, grudgingly, he spread the deerhide over the back-seat cushion. It helped. It hid the spring that was about to stab through.

Mr. Steems was dourly pleased. He went and hocked Mr. Binder's watch and felt a great deal better. He resumed his lawful trade of plying the city streets as a common carrier. Presently he made a soft moaning sound.

Susie's mother stood on the curb, waving imperiously. His taxi flag was up. Trust her to spot that first! He couldn't claim he was busy. Bitterly, he pulled in and opened the back door for her. She got in, puffing a little. She was large and formidable, and Mr. Steems marveled gloomily that a cute trick like Susie could have such a battle-ax for a mother.

"Susie told me to tell you," puffed Mrs. Blepp, "that she can't keep tonight's date."

"Oh, no?" said Mr. Steems sourly.

"No," said Susie's mother severely. She waited challengingly for Steems to drive her home (any hesitation on his part would mean a row with Susie). She slipped off her shoes. She settled back.

Mr. Steems drove. As he drove, he muttered. Susie was breaking a date. Maybe she was going out with someone else. There was a cop named Cassidy who always looked wistfully at Susie, even in the cab of her affianced boy friend. Mr. Steems muttered anathemas upon all cops.

He drew up before Susie's house; Susie wouldn't be home yet. He turned to let Susie's mother out.

His eyes practically popped out of his head.

The back of the cab was empty. On the seat there was seventeen cents in pennies, one nickel, a slightly greenish wedding ring, an empty lipstick container, several straight steel springs, twelve bobbie pins, assorted safety pins, and a very glittering dress ornament. On the floor Mrs. Blepp's shoes remained—size ten and a half.

Mr. Steems cried out hoarsely. He stared about him, gulped several times for air, and then drove rapidly away. Something was wrong. He did not know what, but it was instinct to get away from there. Mr.

Steems did not want trouble. He especially did not want trouble with Susie. But here it was.

This was bad business! Presently he stopped and inspected his cab with infinite care. Nothing. The deerskin made a good-looking seat-cover. That was all. There was no opening anywhere through which Susie's mother could have fallen. She could not have gone out through the door. Under no circumstances would she have abandoned her shoes. Something untoward and upsetting had come into Mr. Steems's life.

Mr. Steems retired to a bar and had several beers. There was a situation to be faced—to be thought out. But Mr. Steems was not an intellectual type. Thinking made his head hurt. He could not ask advice, because nobody would believe what he had to say. Apprehension developed into desperation and then into defiance.

"I didn't do nothing," muttered Mr. Steems truculently. "I don't know nothing about it!" Would Susie not be willing to believe that? "I never seen her!" said Mr. Steems in firm resolve. "I never set eyes on that old battle-ax today! The hell with her!"

He had another beer. Then he realized that to stay encloistered, drinking beer after beer, might suggest to someone that he was upset. So he set out to act in so conspicuously normal a manner that nobody could suspect him of anything. He had lost considerable time in his meditation, however. It was nearly nine o'clock when he resumed his cruising. It was half-past nine when he stopped behind a jam of other vehicles at a red light on Evers Avenue. He waited. He brooded.

Somebody wrenched open the door of the cab and crawled in.

Mr. Steems reacted normally. "Hey! What's the idea? Howya know I want a fare now?"

Something cold and hard touched his spine and a hoarse voice snarled, "Get goin', buddy. Keep your mouth shut an' don't turn around!"

The red light changed. Shouting broke out half a block behind. Mr. Steems—with cold metal urging him—shifted gears with great celerity. He drove with all the enthusiasm of a man with no desire to be mixed up in gunplay. The shouting died away in the distance. Mr. Steems drove on and drove on. Presently he dared to say meekly, "Where you want me to drive you or let you out?"

Behind him there was silence.

Resting on the deerskin seat cover there was a very nasty-looking au-

tomatic pistol, a black-jack, $1.25 in coins, seventeen watches, thirty-four rings, a sterling silver gravy bowl, and a garnet necklace. There were also two large gold teeth.

Mr. Steems, trembling, went home and put the cab away. Then, unable to stay alone, he went out and drank more beers as he tried to figure things out. He did not succeed.

After a long time he muttered bitterly, "It ain't my fault! I don't know nothing about it!" Still later he said more bitterly still, "I can't do nothing about it, anyways!" Both statements were true. They gave Mr. Steems some pleasure. He was innocent. He was blameless. Whatever might turn up, he could stridently and truthfully insist upon his complete rectitude. So he had some more beers.

Came the dawn, and Susie babbling frantically on a telephone. Her mother hadn't come home or called, and it was raining terribly and—

Mr. Steems said indignantly, "I ain't seen her. What's the idea of missing that date with me?"

Susie wept. She repeated that her mother had not come home. The police—Patrolman Cassidy—had checked, and she hadn't been in any accident. Susie wanted Mr. Steems to do something to find out what had become of her mother.

"Huh!" said Mr. Steems. "Nobody ain't going to kidnap her! I don't know nothing about it. What you want me to do?"

Susie, sniffling, wanted him to help find her mother. But Mr. Steems knew better than to try it. It hurt his head even to think about it. Besides, he didn't want to get mixed up in anything.

"Look," he said firmly, "it's rainin' cats and dogs outside. I got to make some money so we can get married, Susie. The old dame'll turn up. Maybe she's just kickin' up her heels. G'by."

He went out to his cab. Rain fell heavily. It should have brought joy to Mr. Steems's heart, but he regarded his cab uneasily. It wore a look of battered innocence. Mr. Steems grimly climbed into the front seat. He set forth to act innocent. It seemed necessary. That was about nine o'clock in the morning.

By half-past ten, cold chills were practically a permanent fixture along his spine. He had had passengers. They had vanished. Unanimously. Inexplicably. They left behind them extraordinary things as mementos. Financially, Mr. Steems was not doing badly. He averaged half a dollar or better in cash from every fare. But otherwise he was doing very badly indeed. At eleven, driving in teeming rain, he saw Pa-

trolman Cassidy—and Cassidy saw him. At Cassidy's gesture Mr. Steems pointed to the back of his cab, implying that he had a fare, and drove on through the rain. His teeth chattered. He drove hastily to his lodgings. Business had been good. Far too good to have allowed Cassidy a look into the cab. Mr. Steems furtively carried into his lodgings:

4 suitcases
1 brief case
3 pairs women's shoes (assorted sizes)
1½ dozen red roses
1 plucked chicken, ready for the oven
2 quarts milk
1 imitation-leather-covered wallpaper catalogue

From his pockets he dumped into a bureau drawer not less than eight watches—men's and women's—four rings, eleven bracelets, and nine scatter pins. He had brushed out of the cab at least a double handful of small nails, practically all of them bent at the end, and many of them rusted.

Mr. Steems was in a deplorable mental state. Once he had stashed his loot, however, indignation took the place of uneasiness.

"What's that guy Cassidy want to see me for, huh?" he demanded of the air. "What's he tryin' to do? Figure I done somethin' to that old bag?"

He drove back indignantly in search of Cassidy. He scowled at the raincoated cop when he found him. Cassidy explained that Susie was upset. Did Mr. Steems, by any chance—

"I told her I didn't know nothing about the old dame!" said Mr. Steems stridently. "Sure, she grafts a ride every time she gets a chance! But I didn't see her yesterday. What's Susie think I done to her, anyway?"

Patrolman Cassidy did not know. Naturally.

And then a passenger with two suitcases and a brief case stepped up beside Cassidy and said, "Is this taxi taken?"

There was nothing for Mr. Steems to do but accept him as a fare. To refuse would have been suspicious.

Two blocks away the cab somehow felt empty—Mr. Steems was acquiring an uncanny ability to feel this—and he turned around and

saw a cigarette case and a monogrammed lighter on the back-seat cushion, with $1.25 in change, pants buttons, metal eyelets suitable for shoes, a gold-barreled ball-point pen, and other miscellany.

Mr. Steems could not afford to cease to drive his taxicab. To do so would be to invite inquiry. He could not refuse passengers. To do so would be instantly suspicious. He was caught in a vise of circumstance. But he had the sustaining conviction of blamelessness. What happened was not his fault. And anyhow he was one of those fortunate people who develops fury as a fine art. It was his custom always to get mad enough soon enough to avoid all need for thought. He went through life in an aura of pleasurable indignation, always assured that anything that happened was somebody else's fault.

That process took over now. When a passenger flagged him down and got in his cab and gave an address, Mr. Steems was blameless. When the passenger vanished into thin air, leaving souvenirs behind, Mr. Steems merely felt his resentment increase. By the end of the second day he seethed as he cleaned up after each departed fare. He raged as he packed his lodgings with the baggage and parcels that mysteriously remained.

Somebody, he muttered darkly to himself, was gonna have to pay for this funny business! Somebody was gonna pay plenty! When they tried to get their stuff back they'd see!

That prospect of future justification and revenge ended his mental efforts. He did call up Susie to find out if her mother had turned up yet —she hadn't, and he generously offered to take Susie out on a date to take her mind off her troubles. But Susie got almost hysterical, and Mr. Steems took refuge in a beer and embittered mutterings. He wasn't responsible for what happened to people who rode with him!

"What's a guy gonna do?" he asked bitterly of his beer glass. There was the possibility that he could cease to drive the cab from which every passenger seemed to vanish into thin air. But he dismissed that notion with incredulous horror. "They want a guy to starve to death?" he demanded truculently.

He would definitely not consider starving to death. But he couldn't fathom the mystery. He'd completely forgotten the clue that might have given him the answer. Mr. Thaddeus Binder had been the first passenger to vanish. He had left the deerskin behind, loaded with his possessions. The deerskin remained, and now frequently was loaded with other people's possessions. But Mr. Steems could not add that

together. And even if he had, Mr. Steems would have failed to understand. He would have needed to be told that Mr. Binder had made an experiment to prove that compenetrability was possible. Maybe even that wouldn't have helped, however; besides, he didn't remember Mr. Binder. He recalled male passengers by their tips and some female ones by their hips. Mr. Binder was gone from his recollection.

A third day passed. Susie's mother did not reappear. Susie took an unreasoning dislike to Mr. Steems. She said he didn't care. As a matter of fact, nobody cared more than he did, but he was in a fix. Susie conferred tearfully with Patrolman Cassidy. Her mother's disappearance was duly reported to the Bureau of Missing Persons. There were a surprising lot of people missing all of a sudden. Patrolman Cassidy discovered the fact and grew ambitious. He considered that in Susie's mother's case he had a lead. He began to work from that standpoint.

After the fourth day of the phenomenon of the disappearing passengers, Mr. Steems's lodgings began to get crowded—with suitcases, packages, storage batteries, saxophones in their cases, groceries of all kinds. One wall of his room was solidly banked with suitcases alone. After the fifth day, the space beneath his bed was filled and a second wall partly obscured. On the sixth day he began really to run out of space.

That day—the sixth—was the day the newspapers broke the story. The headlines were impressive.

52 MISSING IN CITY! MONSTER AT WORK?

And there it was. Up to a given hour, fifty-two citizens of all ages and both sexes had disappeared from the city's streets, and other disappearances were being reported almost hourly: a list of unfortunates who had seemingly gone out of existence like snuffed candle flames. . . .

Mr. Steems read the list with a jaundiced eye. "I never seen none of 'em," he said bitterly to the missing persons' luggage piled against the walls about him. "I don't ask nobody their name an' address when they get in my cab! It ain't none of my business!" Then Mr. Steems again hurled the crushing, unanswerable question at an imaginary interrogator: "Whadda you want a guy to do? Stop runnin' his taxi an' starve to death?"

The newspaper account pointed out that none of the known missing had any reason to disappear. Some had vanished as early as eleven in the morning, and some as late as half-past twelve at night. All had dropped out of sight while on their way from one part of the city to another. Several had last been seen entering a taxicab. Anxious relatives were demanding that the police take drastic action. They demanded the questioning of taxi drivers—

"Yeah!" cried Mr. Steems furiously. "Not only that old bag hadda vanish, so Susie don't speak to me no more, but now they're gonna get everybody scared to ride in taxicabs!" He slammed down the paper and went to the corner saloon. He had a beer. He believed that he thought better with a beer. It was a delusion. He brooded. "Whadda they want?" he muttered oratorically, a little later. "It's them Commies start stories like that! Them newspaper guys, they're Commies!"

He had another beer, and his rage mounted to the point where he dropped a nickel in the saloon pay phone and furiously called a newspaper.

"Whadda you guys tryin' to do?" he demanded shrilly. "You wanna drive a honest, self-respectin' guy outa business? You go printin' stuff about people vanishin' outa taxicabs, and how am I gonna make a livin'? You wanna drive a guy to crime?"

He hung up and went to his cab, muttering embitteredly. Three blocks away he picked up a fat man for a fare. The fat man had an evening paper in his hand. He gave an address. He said in mock fear, "You're not the Taxi Monster, are you?"

Mr. Steems let in the clutch with a violent jerk. He drove a full hundred yards, hissing like superheated steam awaiting release. Then he spoke in a tone of suppressed frenzy. He expressed his opinion of newspaper reporters in terms that would have curdled sulphuric acid. He worked up to scathing comment on people who made jokes at guys who were only trying to earn an honest living. His voice rose. His bitterness increased. When—it was then nine forty-five P.M.—when he came to a red light and a large truck forced him to halt, he was expressing himself at the top of his lungs. There were stores on either side of the street. Their signs lighted his face clearly.

A squad car came to a halt beside him. Patrolman Cassidy said, "That's him!" and got out and walked to the side of the cab. Mr. Steems was saying shrilly, "It's guys like you—guys that because you

got some money think you can raise hell with any guy that's got to make a living—it's guys like you that ruin this country! Yah, you capitalists—"

"Say," said Cassidy in Mt. Steems's ear. "What's the matter?"

Mr. Steems jumped. Cassidy! Outrage upon outrage! He said furiously, "That guy in the back asked me if I'd killed anybody in my cab yet, on accounta that fancy piece in the paper—"

Patrolman Cassidy looked. Then he said, "That guy in the back? What guy in the back?"

Mr. Steems turned. There was no guy in the back at all. But on the deerskin seat cover was a watch, a monogrammed fountain pen in silver and gold, seventy-five cents in small silver, a hearing aid, three pants buttons, a glittering pile of zipper teeth, and a belt buckle.

Patrolman Cassidy signaled to the squad car. He stepped into the cab himself.

"We're going to Headquarters," he said in deadly calm. "I've been checking, and Susie's mother ain't the only one that was last seen getting into your cab, Mr. Steems! We're goin' to Headquarters, and don't you try nothing funny on the way, you hear?"

Mr. Steems practically strangled on his sense of injustice. He started toward Headquarters. The squad car followed closely.

When at last he could speak, Mr. Steems cried shrilly, "You ain't got nothing on me!"

And there was no answer from the back of the cab.

Mr. Steems can tell of these things. He can tell of his status after his lodgings had been searched, and—stacked against the wall, hidden under the bed, jammed into the closet—souvenirs turned up of seventy-one out of the seventy-two persons finally missing. The exception was, of course, Patrolman Cassidy, whose shield, service gun, whistle, handcuffs, brass knuckles, and other assorted metallic mementos lay enshrined at Headquarters as a symbol of devotion to duty.

Mr. Steems became instantly, nationally, famous as the Taxi Monster, murderer by wholesale. His downfall was ascribed to an untiring patrolman who, spurred on by love of a missing person's daughter, had gone sleepless and followed clue after clue until finally he unmasked the monster—and had tragically become his final victim, done somehow to death on the way to Police Headquarters while a squad car followed close behind.

Mr. Steems was held without bail on seventy-one charges of murder in the first degree. (It would have been seventy-two, had Mr. Binder's vanishing been reported.) Mr. Steems's frenziedly righteous protests went unheeded. He was sunk.

But there is justice for all in these United States, especially if publicity goes along with it. A Mr. Irving Castleman was appointed by the court to defend Mr. Steems. He instantly pointed out that not one dead body had so far been found nor had any of the missing persons been seen dead by anybody. The principle of corpus delicti therefore applied. He requested Mr. Steems's instant release. The authorities countered with separate charges of larceny for each article found piled up in Mr. Steems's lodgings. His lawyer submitted that no complaint of theft had been made by any missing person. Those objects might have been gifts to Mr. Steems. There was no proof to the contrary. Mr. Steems should be released. It was not until the cops encouraged a lynching mob to hang around outside the jail that Mr. Steems's lawyer consented to let him stay in a cell as a suspicious person.

Things boomed. Feature writers, news commentators, and gossip columnists made the most of Mr. Steems. He was compared to Mr. Landru, to Mr. Cripps, to Bluebeard, Gilles de Rais, and other mass murderers. His record topped them all. He was tendered the rewards of such eminence. Huge payments were offered for the story of his life and crimes, and his lawyer hopefully urged him to accept so he could pay his trial expenses. Three psychoanalysts explained his urge to kill as the result of childhood frustration. One psychoanalyst said it had developed because he was not frustrated as a child. Four sociologists declared that not Mr. Steems but society would be on trial when he stood before the bar. The Bell Telephone Company set aside its biggest switchboard for the use of the press when the trial took place.

Susie hit the headlines. Not as Mr. Steems's fiancee, however, but as the heartbroken sweetheart of his final victim. Three other women, however, claimed to be already married to him, and twenty-nine more wrote and suggested matrimony.

And then the bottom dropped out of everything.

Patrolman Cassidy, who had vanished from Mr. Steems's cab on the way to Headquarters, came limping into that building in a state of bemused distress. He said he had fallen out of Mr. Steems's cab and found himself minus shield, gun, handcuffs, pants buttons, and the

nails in his shoe, which came apart as he picked himself up. He'd come at once to Headquarters to report. . . .

An hour later a fat man was found lying on the street, out of breath. He insisted that he had kidded a taxicab chauffeur about being The Monster, and the next thing he knew he'd been thrown out on the street. Minus his watch, belt buckle, hearing-aid, pants zipper, shoe nails, and other possessions.

In quick succession other missing persons reappeared on the public streets. All were more or less disheveled. Each had lost all metal carried on his or her person. Each was convinced that he—or she—had not disappeared at all, but had merely gotten into a cab, instantly been thrown out, and immediately had come to report the offense. In four hours, nine missing persons reappeared—persons who had been missing for four to five days. In six hours, fifteen others appeared—having been missing from six days to seven. In twenty-four hours, fifty-eight out of the seventy-one known vanished persons had reappeared and unanimously identified Mr. Steems as associated with their mishap. And the end was not yet.

With keen intelligence, the police observed that those who returned were doing so in the reverse order from that in which they had disappeared. When, therefore, Susie's mother appeared in outraged fury to report the theft of her shoes, wedding ring, and the steel springs out of her foundation garment by the villainous Mr. Steems—whom Susie would never speak to again—the police knew the end was near.

It was nearer than that. It had come. Mr. Binder found himself lying flat on his back on the public highway. He had, he thought at first, fallen out of a taxicab. Then he realized that he had merely fallen into the soft, ancient deerskin over which he had been gloating a moment before at 5:07 in the afternoon of May 3. Now there was neither taxicab nor deerskin about. Moreover, it had suddenly become the middle of the night, and his watch and small change were gone, and his pants were falling down. . . .

Mr. Binder went home—a matter of two blocks. There were papers piled in his front hall. He discovered that it was May 14. He learned what had been going on. He'd gone out of his house, tumbled into the deerskin which proved compenetrability a practical matter—and now it was eleven days and some hours later.

Mr. Binder brewed a cup of strong tea and thought concentratedly.

With the facts before him and his background of technical knowledge, it was not difficult to work out a theory which completely explained all the observed and reported facts. But this had more than merely intellectual interest. There was a legal aspect. Seventy-one people could sue. . . . Mr. Binder shuddered. Then he discovered that his name had not been listed as among the missing. Nobody had reported him gone, because he lived alone. No souvenir of him had been found in Mr. Steems's lodging, because Mr. Steems had hocked his watch.

Mr. Binder came to a very intelligent conclusion. The thing for him to do was keep his mouth shut.

Next day, however, he went over to see his friend Mr. McFadden.

"Now, what d'you know!" said Mr. McFadden. "I had it you were a victim of that there Taxi Monster. Where were you, anyway?"

"I'd like to be sure," said Mr. Binder. "Listen, George!"

He told Mr. McFadden exactly what had happened. He had found, said Mr. Binder, the secret of compenetration. The atoms of solid things, even steel, are very small and relatively far apart, so that the solidest of objects has actually as much empty space in it as a dust cloud; neutrons and cosmic rays go through without trouble. Ordinarily two solid objects can no more penetrate each other than two dust clouds can penetrate each other. The dust clouds are held together by the air on which the dust particles float. Solid objects are held together by the electric and magnetic fields the individual atoms possess. But *if* the electric fields of atoms can be stopped from hindering, there is plenty of room for one seemingly solid object to penetrate another, and therefore for two or more things to be in the same place at the same time.

"And that," said Mr. Binder, "is what I did. I couldn't take away all the hindering of the atoms, George. I could just cut it down. But I fixed up a deerskin that used to be a throw on the parlor settee, and I could push anything but metal right through it without making a hole. Metal wouldn't go through. It stayed behind. I had the deerskin sort of magnetized, George, and the effect wouldn't last forever, but I started over here with it to show you that I could make things compenetrate."

"Does that tell me where you've been—if I believe it?"

"Well," said Mr. Binder, considering, "I don't know that it does. You see, George, I missed out on one thing. Normally those atom fields

hold each atom in its place up and down, and side to side, and fore and aft—if you get what I mean. When something—an atom—tries to push between them, they push right back. But when I hindered them from that, they still pushed. Only they pushed at right angles to up and down and side to side and fore and aft. At right angles to all of the other directions they ought to push in."

"At right angles to all other directions?" said Mr. McFadden skeptically. "How could that be? 'Twould be a fourth dimension!"

"It was," said Mr. Binder modestly. "And the fourth dimension's time flow, George. So when I fell through the deerskin and all those atoms pushed on the atoms that are me, they pushed me off into the fourth dimension. They pushed me into the middle of week after next. This is the middle of week after next to me, George. By relativity."

Mr. McFadden stared. Then, carefully, he filled his pipe. He lighted it and puffed without words. Mr. McFadden was a skeptical man.

Mr. Binder said meditatively, "Ah, well! Those atoms that get their fields all tricked up won't stay that way. Every day they threw people who fell through the deerskin just a little shorter distance. From the middle of the week after next, where they threw me, they've slowed down and slowed down. By what the papers say, I figure the last missing people only got thrown into the day after tomorrow. And maybe by this time the atoms in the deerskin are back to normal and won't allow any compenetration."

"Is that so?" said Mr. McFadden with fine scorn.

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Binder regretfully. "Compenetration can be done, George, but it just isn't practical. I'm going to try replication."

"And what, may I ask, is replication?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Binder enthusiastically. "That's the philosophical notion that it could be possible for the same thing to be in several places at the same time! That has possibilities, George!"

It can be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is now at work on the problem of replication, which—he will explain—is a philosophico-scientific prospect of great interest. He is a very nice, pink-cheeked, little man, Mr. Binder, but maybe somebody ought to stop him. He does not realize his talents. Replication, now . . .

Mr. Steems could be applied to for an opinion. After all, he has had experience with Mr. Binder's experiments. If the matter of the Taxi Monster and the middle of the week after next is mentioned in his vicinity, he will begin to speak rapidly and with emotion. His speech

will grow impassioned, his tone will grow hoarse and shrill at the same time, and presently he will foam at the mouth. But on the other hand, Susie Blepp and Patrolman Cassidy feel quite otherwise.

It's pretty hard to decide.

Lester del Rey

. . . AND IT COMES OUT HERE

Time travel is bound to result in a wide variety of paradoxes, such as a grandfather meeting a grandson when the grandson is older than the grandfather, or things even more unlikely, as you will see. Ordinarily such paradoxes occur during time travel in the past, not the future, but this story is so curiously constructed that it deals with both "past" and "future" at the same time, difficult though it may sound. And here the paradox itself is made to serve as the basis of a first-class plot. Of course, it never does unwind; the paradox remains paradoxical forever; but the story does not suffer because of that!

NO, YOU'RE wrong. I'm not your father's ghost, even if I do look a bit like him. But it's a longish story, and you might as well let me in. You will, you know, so why quibble about it? At least, you always have . . . or do . . . or will. I don't know, verbs get all mixed up. We don't have the right attitude toward tenses for a situation like this.

Anyhow, you'll let me in. I did, so you will.

Thanks. You think you're crazy, of course, but you'll find out you aren't. It's just that things are a bit confused. And don't look at the machine out there too long; until you get used to it, you'll find it's hard on the eyes, trying to follow where the vanes go. You'll get used to it, of course, but it will take about thirty years.

You're wondering whether to give me a drink, as I remember it. Why not? And naturally, since we have the same tastes, you can make the same for me as you're having. Of course we have the same tastes —we're the same person. I'm you thirty years from now, or you're me. I remember just how you feel; I felt the same way when he—that is, of course, I or we—came back to tell me about it, thirty years ago.

Here, have one of these. You'll get to like them in a couple more years. And you can look at the revenue stamp date if you still doubt my story. You'll believe it eventually, though, so it doesn't matter.

Right now, you're shocked. It's a real wrench when a man meets himself for the first time. Some kind of telepathy seems to work between two of the same people. You *sense* things. So I'll simply go ahead talking for half an hour or so, until you get over it. After that

you'll come along with me. You know, I could try to change things around by telling what happened to me; but he—I—told me what I was going to do, so I might as well do the same. I probably couldn't help telling you the same thing in the same words, even if I tried—and I don't intend to try. I've gotten past that stage of worrying about all this.

So let's begin when you get up in half an hour and come out with me. You'll take a closer look at the machine, then. Yes, it'll be pretty obvious it must be a time machine. You'll sense that, too. You've seen it, just a small little cage with two seats, a luggage compartment, and a few buttons on a dash. You'll be puzzling over what I'll tell you and you'll be getting used to the idea that you are the man who makes atomic power practical. Jerome Boell, just a plain engineer, the man who put atomic power in every home. You won't exactly believe it, but you'll want to go along.

I'll be tired of talking by then, and in a hurry to get going. So I cut off your questions and get you inside. I snap on a green button, and everything seems to cut off around us. You can see a sort of foggy nothing surrounding the cockpit; it is probably the field that prevents passage through time from affecting us. The luggage section isn't protected, though.

You start to say something, but by then I'm pressing a black button and everything outside will disappear. You look for your house but it isn't there. There is exactly nothing there—in fact, there is no *there.* You are completely outside time and space, as near as you can figure.

You can't feel any motion, of course. You try to reach a hand out through the field into the nothing around you, and your hand goes out, all right, but nothing happens. Where the screen ends, your hand just turns over and pokes back at you. Doesn't hurt, and when you pull your arm back you're still sound and uninjured. But it looks frightening, and you don't try it again.

Then it comes to you slowly that you're actually traveling in time. You turn to me, getting used to the idea. "So this is the fourth dimension?" you ask.

Then you feel silly, because you'll remember that I said you'd ask that. Well, I asked it after I was told, then I came back and told it to you and I still can't help answering when you speak.

"Not exactly," I try to explain. "Maybe it's no dimension—or it might be the fifth; if you're going to skip over the so-called fourth without

traveling along it, you'd need a fifth. Don't ask me. I didn't invent the machine and I don't understand it."

"But . . ."

I let it go, and so do you. If you don't, it's a good way of going crazy. You'll see later why I couldn't have invented the machine. Of course, there may have been a start for all this once. There may have been a time when you did invent the machine—the atomic motor first, then the time machine. And when you closed the loop by going back and saving yourself the trouble, it got all tangled up. I figured out once that such a universe would need some seven or eight time and space dimensions. It's simpler just to figure that this is the way time got bent back on itself. Maybe there is no machine, and it's just easier for us to imagine it. When you spend thirty years thinking about it, as I did—and you will—you get farther and farther from an answer.

Anyhow, you sit there, watching nothing all around you, and no time passes, apparently, though there is a time effect back in the luggage space. You look at your watch and it's still running. That means you either carry a small time field with you or you are catching a small increment of time from the main field. I don't know, and you won't think about that then, either.

I'm smoking, and so are you, and the air in the machine is getting a bit stale. You suddenly realize that everything in the machine is wide open, yet you haven't seen any effects of air loss.

"Where are we getting our air?" you ask. "Or why don't we lose it?"

"No place for it to go," I explain. There isn't. Out there is neither time nor space, apparently. How could the air leak out? You still feel gravity, but I can't explain that, either. Maybe the machine has a gravity field built in, or maybe the time that makes your watch run is responsible for gravity. In spite of Einstein, you have always had the idea that time is an effect of gravity, and I sort of agree, still.

Then the machine stops—at least, the field around us cuts off. You feel a dankish sort of air replace the stale air, and you breathe easier, though we're in complete darkness except for the weak light in the machine, which always burns, and a few feet of rough dirty cement floor around. You take another cigarette from me and you get out of the machine, just as I do.

I've got a bundle of clothes and I start changing. It's a sort of simple, short-limbed, one-piece affair I put on, but it feels comfortable.

"I'm staying here," I tell you. "This is like the things they wear in this century, as near as I can remember it, and I should be able to pass fairly well. I've had all my fortune—the one you make on that atomic generator—invested in such a way I can get it by using some identification I've got with me, so I'll do all right. I know they still use some kind of money—you'll see evidence of that. And it's a pretty easygoing civilization, from what I could see. We'll go up and I'll leave you. I like the looks of things here, so I won't be coming back with you."

You nod, remembering I've told you about it. "What century is this, anyway?"

I'd told you that, too, but you've forgotten. "As near as I can guess, it's about 2150. He told me, just as I'm telling you, that it's an interstellar civilization."

You take another cigarette from me and follow me. I've got a small flashlight and we grope through a pile of rubbish, out into a corridor. This is a sub-sub-subbasement. We have to walk up a flight of stairs, and there is an elevator waiting, fortunately with the door open.

"What about the time machine?" you ask.

"Since nobody ever stole it, it's safe."

We get in the elevator, and I say "first" to it. It gives out a soughing noise and the basement openings begin to click by us. There's no feeling of acceleration—some kind of false gravity they use in the future. Then the door opens and the elevator says "first" back at us.

It's obviously a service elevator, and we're in a dim corridor, with nobody around. I grab your hand and shake it. "You go that way. Don't worry about getting lost; you never did, so you can't. Find the museum, grab the motor, and get out. And good luck to you."

You act as if you're dreaming, though you can't believe it's a dream. You nod at me, and I move out into the main corridor. A second later you see me going by, mixed into a crowd that is loafing along toward a restaurant—or something like it—that is just opening. I'm asking questions of a man, who points, and I turn and move off.

You come out of the side corridor and go down a hall away from the restaurant. There are quiet little signs along the hall. You look at them, realizing for the first time that things have changed.

Steij:neri, Faunten, Z:rgat Dispenseri. The signs are very quiet and dignified. Some of them can be decoded to stationery shops, fountains, and the like. What a zergot is, you don't know. You stop at a sign that announces: *Trav:l Biwrou—F:rst-Clas Twrz—Marz, Viin*s, and x:*

*Trouj:n Planets. Spej:l reits tu aol s*nz wixin 60 lyt iirz!* But there is only a single picture of a dull-looking metal sphere, with passengers moving up a ramp, and the office is closed. You begin to get the hang of the spelling they use, though.

Now there are people around you, but nobody pays much attention to you. Why should they? You wouldn't care if you saw a man in a leopard-skin suit—you'd figure it was some part in a play and let it go. Well, people don't change much.

You get up your courage and go up to a boy selling something that might be papers on tapes.

"Where can I find the Museum of Science?"

"Downayer rien turn lefa the sign. Stoo bloss," he tells you. Around you, you hear some pretty normal English, but there are others using stuff as garbled as his. The educated and uneducated? I don't know.

You go right until you find a big sign built into the rubbery surface of the walk: *Miuzi:m *v Syens.* There's an arrow pointing, and you turn left. Ahead of you, two blocks on, you can see a pink building with faint aqua trimming, bigger than most of the others. They are building lower than they used to, apparently. Twenty floors up seems about the maximum. You head for it and find the sidewalk is marked with the information that it is the museum.

You go up the steps but you see that it seems to be closed. You hesitate for a moment, then. You're beginning to think the whole affair is complete nonsense, and you should get back to the time machine and go home. But then a guard comes to the gate. Except for the short legs in his suit and the friendly grin on his face, he looks like any other guard.

What's more, he speaks pretty clearly. Everyone says things in a sort of drawl, with softer vowels and slurred consonants, but it's rather pleasant.

"Help you, sir? Oh, of course. You must be playing in *Atoms and Axioms.* The museum's closed, but I'll be glad to let you study whatever you need for realism in your role. Nice show. I saw it twice."

"Thanks," you mutter, wondering what kind of civilization can produce guards as polite as that. "I—I'm told I should investigate your display of atomic generators."

He beams at that. "Of course." The gate is swung to behind you, but obviously he isn't locking it. In fact, there doesn't seem to be a lock.

"Must be a new part. You go down that corridor, up one flight of stairs, and left. Finest display in all the known worlds. We've got the original of the first thirteen models. Professor Jonas was using them to check his latest theory of how they work. Too bad he could not explain the principle, either. Someone will some day, though. Lord, the genius of that twentieth-century inventor! It's quite a hobby with me, sir. I've read everything I could get on the period. Oh—congratulations on your pronunciation. Sounds just like some of our oldest tapes."

You get away from him finally, after some polite thanks. The building seems deserted and you wander up the stairs. There's a room on your right, filled with something that proclaims itself the first truly plastic diamond-former, and you go up to it. As you come near, it goes through a crazy wiggle inside, stops turning out a continual row of what seem to be bearings, and slips something the size of a penny toward you.

"Souvenir," it announces in a well-modulated voice. "This is a typical gem of the twentieth century, properly cut to fifty-eight facets, known technically as a Jaegger diamond, and approximately twenty carats in size. You can have it made into a ring on the third floor during morning hours for one-tenth credit. If you have more than one child, press the red button for the number of stones you desire."

You put it in your pocket, gulping a little, and get back to the corridor. You turn left and go past a big room in which models of spaceships—from the original thing that looks like a V-2 and is labeled *First Lunar Rocket,* to a ten-foot globe complete with miniature manikins—are sailing about in some kinds of orbits. Then there is one labeled *Wep:nz,* filled with everything from a crossbow to a tiny rod four inches long and half the thickness of a pencil, marked *Fynal Hand Arm.* Beyond is the end of the corridor, and a big place that bears a sign: *Mad:lz *v Atamic Pau:r Sorsez.*

By that time you're almost convinced, and you've been doing a lot of thinking about what you can do. The story I'm telling has been sinking in, but you aren't completely willing to accept it.

You notice that the models are all mounted on tables and that they're a lot smaller than you thought. They seem to be in chronological order, and the latest one, marked *2147—Rincs Dyn*pat:,* is about the size of a desk telephone. The earlier ones are larger, of course, clumsier, but with variations, probably depending on the power output. A big sign on the ceiling gives a lot of dope on atomic generators, ex-

plaining that this is the first invention which leaped full-blown into basically final form.

You study it, but it casually mentions the inventor, without giving his name. Either they don't know it or they take it for granted that everyone does, which seems more probable. They call attention to the fact that they have the original model of the first atomic generator built, complete with design drawings, original manuscript on operation, and full patent application.

They state that it has all major refinements, operating on any fuel, producing electricity at any desired voltage up to five million, any chosen cyclic rate from direct current to one thousand megacycles, and any amperage up to one thousand, its maximum power output being fifty kilowatts, limited by the current-carrying capacity of the outputs. They also mention that the operating principle is still being investigated and that only such refinements as better alloys and the addition of magnetric and nucleatric current outlets have been added since the original.

So you go to the end and look over the thing. It's simply a square box with a huge plug on each side, and a set of vernier controls on top, plus a little hole marked in old-style spelling: *Drop BBs or wire here.* Apparently that's the way it's fueled. It's about one foot on each side.

"Nice," the guard says over your shoulder. "It finally wore out one of the cathogrids and we had to replace that, but otherwise it's exactly as the great inventor made it. And it still operates as well as ever. Like to have me tell you about it?"

"Not particularly," you begin, and then realize bad manners might be conspicuous here. While you're searching for an answer the guard pulls something out of his pocket and stares at it.

"Fine, fine. The mayor of Altasecarba—Centaurian, you know—is arriving, but I'll be back in about ten minutes. He wants to examine some of the weapons for a monograph on Centaurian primitives as compared to nineteenth-century man. You'll pardon me?"

You pardon him pretty eagerly, and he wanders off happily. You go up to the head of the line to that Rinks Dynapattuh, or whatever it transliterates to. That's small and you can carry it. But the darned thing is absolutely fixed. You can't see any bolts but you can't budge it, either.

You work down the line. It'd be foolish to take the early model if you can get one with built-in magnetic current terminals—Ehrenhaft

or some other principle—and nuclear binding-force energy terminals. But they're all held down by the same whatchamaycallem effect.

And finally you're right back beside the original first model. It's probably bolted down too, but you try it tentatively and you find it moves. There's a little sign under it, indicating you shouldn't touch it, since the gravostatic plate is being renewed.

Well, you won't be able to change the time cycle by doing anything I haven't told you, but a working model such as that is a handy thing. You lift it; it only weighs about fifty pounds! Naturally, it can be carried.

You expect a warning bell, but nothing happens. As a matter of fact, if you'd stop drinking so much of that Scotch and staring at the time machine out there now, you'd hear what I'm saying and know what will happen to you. But of course, just as I did, you're going to miss a lot of what I say from now on, and have to find out for yourself. But maybe some of it helps. I've tried to remember how much I remembered after he told me, but I can't be sure. So I'll keep on talking. I probably can't help it, anyhow. Pre-set, you might say.

Well, you stagger down the corridor, looking out for the guard, but all seems clear. Then you hear his voice from the weapons room. You bend down and try to scurry past but you know you're in full view. Nothing happens, though.

You stumble down the stairs, feeling all the futuristic rays in the world on your back, and still nothing happens. Ahead of you, the gate is closed. You reach it and it opens obligingly by itself. You breathe a quick sigh of relief and start out onto the street.

Then there's a yell behind you. You don't wait. You put one leg in front of the other and you begin racing down the walk, ducking past people, who stare at you with expressions you haven't time to see. There's another yell behind you.

Something goes over your head and drops with a sudden ringing sound on the sidewalk just in front of your feet. You don't wait to find out about that, either. Somebody reaches out a hand to catch you, and you dart past.

The street is pretty clear now, and you jolt along with your arms seeming to come out of their sockets, and that atomic generator getting heavier at every step.

Out of nowhere, something in a blue uniform about six feet tall and on the beefy side appears—and the badge hasn't changed much. The

cop catches your arm, and you know you're not going to get away, so you stop.

"You can't exert yourself that hard in this heat, fellow," the cop says. "There are laws against that, without a yellow sticker. Here, let me grab you a taxi."

Reaction sets in a bit, and your knees begin to buckle, but you shake your head and come up for air.

"I—I left my money home," you begin.

The cop nods. "Oh, that explains it. Fine, I won't have to give you an appearance schedule. But you should have come to me." He reaches out and taps a pedestrian lightly on the shoulder. "Sir, an emergency request. Would you help this gentleman?"

The pedestrian grins, looks at his watch, and nods. "How far?"

You did notice the name of the building from which you came, and you mutter it. The stranger nods again, reaches out and picks up the other side of the generator, blowing a little whistle the cop hands him. Pedestrians begin to move aside, and you and the stranger jog down the street at a trot, with a nice clear path, while the cop stands beaming at you both.

That way, it isn't so bad. And you begin to see why I decided I might like to stay in the future. But all the same, the organized cooperation here doesn't look too good. The guard can get the same and be there before you.

And he is. He stands just inside the door of the building as you reach it. The stranger lifts an eyebrow and goes off at once when you nod at him, not waiting for thanks. And the guard comes up, holding some dingus in his hand about the size of a big folding camera and not too dissimilar in other ways. He snaps it open and you get set to duck.

"You forgot the prints, monograph, and patent applications," he says. "They go with the generator—we don't like to have them separated. A good thing I knew the production office of *Atoms and Axioms* was in this building. Just let us know when you're finished with the model and we'll pick it up."

You swallow several sets of tonsils you had removed years before and take the bundle of papers he hands you out of the little case. He pumps you for some more information, which you give him at random. It seems to satisfy your amiable guard friend. He finally smiles in satisfaction and heads back to the museum.

You still don't believe it, but you pick up the atomic generator and the information sheets, and you head down toward the service elevator. There is no button on it. In fact, there's no door there.

You start looking for other doors or corridors, but you know this is right. The signs along the halls are the same as they were.

Then there's a sort of cough and something dilates in the wall. It forms a perfect door, and the elevator stands there waiting. You get in, gulping out something about going all the way down, and then wonder how a machine geared for voice operation can make anything of that. What the deuce would that lowest basement be called? But the elevator has closed and is moving downward in a hurry. It coughs again and you're at the original level. You get out—and realize you don't have a light.

You'll never know what you stumbled over, but somehow you move back in the direction of the time machine, bumping against boxes, staggering here and there, and trying to find the right place by sheer feel. Then a shred of dim light appears; it's the weak light in the time machine.

You've located it.

You put the atomic generator in the luggage space, throw the papers down beside it, and climb into the cockpit, sweating and mumbling. You reach forward toward the green button and hesitate. There's a red one beside it, and you finally decide on that.

Suddenly there's a confused yell from the direction of the elevator, and a beam of light strikes against your eyes, with a shout punctuating it. Your finger touches the red button.

You'll never know what the shouting was about—whether they finally doped out the fact that they'd been robbed or whether they were trying to help you. You don't care which it is. The field springs up around you, and the next button you touch—the one on the board that hasn't been used so far—sends you off into nothingness. There is no beam of light, you can't hear a thing, and you're safe.

It isn't much of a trip back. You sit there smoking and letting your nerves settle back to normal. You notice a third set of buttons with some pencil marks over them—"Press these to return to yourself thirty years ago"—and you begin waiting for the air to get stale. It doesn't because there is only one of you this time.

Instead, everything flashes off and you're sitting in the machine in your own back yard.

You'll figure out the cycle in more detail later. You get into the machine in front of your house, go to the future in the subbasement, land in your back yard, and then hop back thirty years to pick up yourself, landing in front of your house. Just that. But right then you don't care. You jump out and start pulling out that atomic generator and taking it inside.

It isn't hard to disassemble, but you don't learn a thing; just some plates of metal, some spiral coils, and a few odds and ends—all things that can be made easily enough, all obviously of common metals. But when you put it together again about an hour later, you notice something.

Everything in it is brand-new and there's one set of copper wires missing! It won't work. You put in some number twelve house wire, exactly like the set on the other side, drop in some iron filings, and try it again.

And with the controls set at one hundred and twenty volts, sixty cycles, and fifteen amperes, you get just that. You don't need the power company any more. And you feel a little happier when you realize that the luggage space wasn't insulated from time effects by a field, so the motor has moved backward in time, somehow, and is back to its original youth—minus the replaced wires the guard mentioned—which probably wore out because of the makeshift job you've just done.

But you begin getting more of a jolt when you find that the papers are all in your own writing, that your name is down as the inventor, and that the date of the patent application is 1951.

It will begin to soak in, then. You pick up an atomic generator in the future and bring it back to the past—your present—so that it can be put in the museum with you as the inventor so you can steal it to be the inventor. And you do it in a time machine which you bring back to yourself to take yourself into the future to return to take back to yourself. . . .

Who invented what? And who built which?

Before long, your riches from the generator are piling in. Little kids from school are coming around to stare at the man who changed history and made atomic power so common that no nation could hope to be anything but a democracy, and a peaceful one—after some of the worst times in history for a few years. Your name eventually becomes as common as Ampere, or Faraday, or any other spelled without a capital letter.

But you're thinking of the puzzle. You can't find any answer.

One day you come across an old poem—something about some folks calling it evolution and others calling it God. You go out, make a few provisions for the future, and come back to climb into the time machine that's waiting in the building you had put around it. Then you'll be knocking on your own door, thirty years back—or right now, from your view—and telling your younger self all these things I'm telling you.

But now . . .

Well, the drinks are finished. You're woozy enough to go along with me without protest, and I want to find out just why those people up there came looking for you and shouting, before the time machine left.

Let's go.

AT ONE time this type of time-travel story was exceedingly common in the science-fiction pulps. People were always getting into their time machines, popping back to the days of Nero and fixing things up there, or visiting the Vikings and setting them right, or changing the French Revolution. Today, thanks to a higher selectivity on the part of most editors, time travel to the past is a rare and a relatively reasonable proposition—if one can use so unseemly a word in this connection. The more obvious paradoxes involved in changing the past are avoided or, if they occur, are explained by suitably "logical" devices, some of which you will encounter in the following four stories.

A. Bertram Chandler

CASTAWAY

The author of this upsetting little tale is an officer in the British merchant marine (which is why his maritime detail is so real) and a writer of first-rate science fiction. Occasionally, when he turns to sinister fantasy of this sort, he uses the pseudonym of "George Whitley," which is the name under which "Castaway" was originally published. His own name is used by permission.

Here, far from trying to avoid or solve the great time-travel paradox, Mr. Chandler throws his hero into its very vortex to let him either sink in it or swim out of it. The startling thing about this story is that, by the very logic of the situation, he does neither. . . .

THE water, that at first had been so warm, enveloped him with a cold embrace that contracted his muscles, that threatened to squeeze his heart itself to a standstill. The salt mouthfuls that he was now swallowing with almost every stroke choked him and seared his lungs. The smarting eyes were blind, no longer staring toward the yellow line of beach that, at the beginning of it all, had seemed so close. He no longer knew or cared where he was going, no longer wondered if he would ever get there. The tired limbs automatically went through their feeble, no longer rhythmic, motions—but it was only that part of himself which must always refuse to acknowledge the ultimate defeat.

Perhaps he was already drowning. Perhaps it was only his memory harking back to some happier time, some period when the world held more then this hopeless, wet misery. For it was not the whole of his past life that flashed before his inward eye as the prelude to ultimate extinction. It was only the events just prior to his present predicament.

He was walking the bridge again, warm in the afternoon sunlight, dry, the heat tempered by the pleasant Pacific breeze. And he was hearing the carefree voices of the dayworkers and the watch on deck as, swinging in their bos'ns' chairs, they happily slapped the Company's colors—clean, fresh cream over vividly garish red lead—onto the recently scaled funnel.

They were cheerful—and there was no reason why they should not have been. It was one of those days when, somehow, it is perfectly ob-

vious that God is in His heaven and that all is well with the world.

Fine on the starboard bow was the island. Lazily he told himself that he would take a four-point bearing, would obtain a distance off and a fix. He went into the chartroom, leafed through the *Pacific Pilot* until he found the right page. He read ". . . when last visted, by Captain Wallis of H.M.S. *Searcher* in 1903, was uninhabited. There are one or two springs, and the water is good. . . ."

Somebody was shouting. He put the book down hastily, went out to the bridge. The men dangling from the tall funnel were calling and pointing. He looked in the direction they indicated, could not be sure of what he saw, took the telescope from its long box.

The island—white surf, yellow beach, green jungle—swam unsteadily in the circular field of the telescope. But there was a fresh color added—a column of thick brown smoke that billowed up from the beach, that thinned to a dense haze against the blue, cloudless sky.

He had called the captain then. The Old Man had come up, surly at the breaking of his afternoon rest but immediately alert when he had seen the smoke. Some poor devil of an airman, he had said it might be, or the survivors of shipwreck, victims of the tropical storm that had swept this area a few days previously.

The course was altered at once to bring the island more nearly ahead. In this there was no danger; the soundings ran fantastically deep almost to the thin line of beach itself. And the watch on deck laid aside their paintbrushes, busied themselves clearing away the motor launch.

By this time the news had spread through the ship. The other officers came up, stared at the island and its smoke signal through binoculars and telescopes. Some of them said that they could see a little figure beside the fire, dancing and waving. And the captain, after careful examination of the *Pilot Book* and of the largest scale chart of the vicinity, was conning his ship in on such an approach that his boat would have the minimum distance to run to the beach, but so that the ship herself would always be in deep water. As additional precautions, the echo sounding recorder was started up and lookouts posted.

And that was the last of his life before this eternity of cold, wet misery, of aching limbs that moved on and on of their own volition when he would willingly have willed them to stop; of blinded, smarting eyes, of throat and lungs burning from the increasingly frequent gulps of salt water.

His bare knees ground on something hard and sharp. The pain of it made him cry out. His hands went down, and he felt sand and coral rocks. He could see now, mistily, and he dragged himself up the beach to where the fire was still burning. And as he collapsed on the sand beside it the fleeting, ironical thought flashed through his bemused brain that now the castaway would have to give aid to one of his would-be rescuers. And that was his last thought until he awoke some hours later.

It was night when he woke up. There was a full moon, so he was able to take stock of his surroundings at once, did not have to go through a period of confused and panic-stricken fumbling in the darkness. Beside him, a black patch on the pale sand, the fire was no more than dead ashes.

There was something missing. At first he could not place it—then suddenly realized that it was the man who had lit the fire. He got shakily to his feet then. Every bone was aching, and the lighter which, wrapped in his tobacco pouch, he always kept in the right-hand pocket of his shorts had gouged what seemed to be a permanent hole in his hip. He stood there for a while, staring about him. There was nothing to be seen but the pale sand, luminous in the glare of the moon, stretching away on either side of him—that and the sea, smooth, misty blue, and the dark, forbidding trees inland.

He shouted then. At first it was *"Ahoy! Where are you?"*—and then it degenerated into a mere wordless bellowing. But he could not keep it up for long. His throat was dry and parched; the natural aftermath of his frequent and copious swallowings of salt water was a raging thirst.

Some memory of boyhood books about castaways on desert islands stirred in his brain. He began to look for footprints. On the further side of what had been the fire he found them. And this evidence that the castaway, the man who had built and lit the fire, did exist was rather frightening. What manner of man could he have been to have fled into the jungle? There was only one answer to the question—*Mad*. Possibly some poor, starved creature whose brain had finally snapped when the rescue ship, striking the floating mine (for that, the sole survivor of the rescue ship had decided, was what must have happened—even now, years after the finish of the war, blind, insensate death still lurked along the seaways), had disintegrated in flame and thunder.

But the footprints must lead somewhere. The man from the ship followed them. A direction was the only information they gave him. They had been made in dry sand and could not tell him anything, not even the size of the feet that had made them.

They ended where the sand stretched for perhaps a hundred feet in wet and glistening contrast to the dry grains on either side of it. This, obviously, was one of the springs of which mention had been made in the *Pilot*. Inland, among the low trees, there was a shallow channel, a sluggish stream. The man went down on his hands and knees and scooped up a double handful of the water. It was only slightly brackish. He soon tired of this unsatisfactory and unsatisfying means of quenching his thirst and plunged his face into the wet coolness. Even so, he restrained himself. He knew of the discomfort that follows upon too hasty indulgence. He rose to a sitting posture and rested. Then, after a while, he drank again.

When he had finished he felt better. Automatically his hand went to his pocket for his pipe. It was not there. He tried to remember where he had left it. He forced his memory back, step by step, until it rewarded his persistence with a picture of the old briar being placed on top of the flag locker in the wheelhouse. He swore softly. The pouch in the right-hand pocket of his shorts was more than half full. He took it out, opened it, ran his fingers through the tobacco that, in spite of his long swim, had remained dry. The lighter was dry, too. At the first flick of the little wheel the flame sprang into being. He blew it out hastily. He could not afford to waste fuel. Fire might well be his most treasured possession. He remembered, then, the fire that the other castaway had lit. He remembered, with something of a shock, the other castaway.

The unpleasant vision of a homicidal maniac sprang into brief being, then receded. He knew that he had laid himself open to attack while drinking at the stream—and attack had not come. His first theory must be right—that of the poor, half-starved, half-crazed creature who had fled into the jungle at the sight and sound of the explosion.

Slowly, limping a little with the pain of his gashed knees, his aching bones and muscles, he made his way back to the ashes of the fire. He sat down beside them, intending to stay awake until daylight in case the other unwilling inhabitant of the island should return. And he fell asleep almost at once.

At his second awakening the sun was well up. It was the heat that prodded him into wakefulness. When he climbed stiffly to his feet he found that his clothing was stiff and prickly, was glittering with crystals of dry salt.

He hoped wildly that the fire maker would have returned during the night. But the beach was still empty. So was the sea. That was to be expected. The island was miles from the usual shipping lanes. It was only some fancy, current-chasing track of the Old Man's that had brought his vessel to within sight of it. Still he stared at the sea, praying that at least one of his shipmates might have survived the mysterious loss of the ship. But there was nothing. Not even a hatch or a grating, raft or lifebuoy.

Food was now a matter of some urgency. He looked inland to where a few coconut palms waved feathery fronds across the blue sky, decided that an assault upon them could wait until he had quenched his thirst. By the time he had reached the stream, the discomfort of an itching skin was greater than that of an empty belly. So, having drunk his fill, he stripped off his shorts and shirt and rinsed them thoroughly in the fresh water. He spread them on a convenient tree to dry in the sun. He took off his light canvas shoes and rinsed them, too. And he splashed for a while in the shallows and then sat, half in sunlight, half in shadow, to wait for his clothing to dry.

It was still a little damp when he put it on. He hesitated before returning his pouch and the precious lighter to his pocket—then told himself that if it had survived a swim surely it would not be harmed by a temporary dampness. And he was anxious to strike inland in search of something edible and—although this was fast becoming relegated to the back of his mind—the other castaway.

The undergrowth was heavily matted, and the bed of the stream offered the best approach to the interior of the island. As he splashed inland he looked about him for anything that would serve as food. But everything was unfamiliar. Then, after a sweating half hour or so, the loneliness of it all became oppressive. He was looking less for something to eat than signs of companionship. Often he would pause and stand there, listening, but apart from the low ripple of the stream over its rocky bed there was no sound.

Panic came then. He started to run, slipping and stumbling over the water-worn rocks. And he almost missed the ship. He was already past it when a belated message from his optic nerves made him stop sud-

denly, turn, and retrace his steps. And the ship was too big to miss. He stood for long minutes staring at it, wondering how a contraption so huge and so outlandish could have found its way into the middle of the jungle.

It stood beside the stream, in the middle of a little clearing. It had been there for a long time. The metal of which it was built was dulled by age. Creepers from the growth all around it had evidently tried to find purchase on the smooth plating but, with the exception of those around a ladder extending from a circular door or port to the ground, had failed.

And as the man stared he began to see something familiar about the strange construction. It was like, although on a far vaster scale, the V-2 rockets used by Germany during the war. Its streamlined body stood upright, supported by four huge vanes. There were ports in its sides. And its nose, towering above the trees, was what an airman would have called a "greenhouse."

The man shouted.

There might be somebody in the ship.

There must be somebody in the ship—the man who had made the fire.

He shouted again: "Ahoy! Is anybody . . ."

And he broke off in midsentence.

Was it a man who had made the fire?

Was it a *man?*

He had read somewhere that V-2 was the first spaceship. This—a huge rocket, manned, if the evidence of its ports were to be believed, could be a spaceship.

And it wouldn't be an earthly one. . . .

He shivered, remembering the unpleasant extra-Terran life forms cooked up by Wells and all his imitators. This, he told himself, would explain everything. He scrambled in the bed of the stream until he found a stone, elongated and with a natural grip, that would make a club of sorts. And he walked slowly and warily toward the ladder.

It was there, at the foot of the ladder, that he found the first skeleton. He did not see it—so intent was he on the port in the ship's side —until the ribs cracked under his feet. He jumped back hastily, fearing some kind of trap. It was a long while before his heart stopped pumping noisily, before he was able to bring himself to examine the cause of his alarm.

It was a human skeleton. There was nothing alien, nothing Otherworldly about it. The skull, brown and discolored, grinned up at him with that singular lack of dignity found only in dry bones. Death is only horrible and frightening when recent.

The castaway stood for a while studying his find. He picked up the skull. He examined it with some hazy idea of determining the cause of death. He wondered to what race its owner had belonged. "It's a white man's skull," he said with conviction—although he did not know why he should be so sure. He put it down with the rest of the bones and thought, "I'll have to give the poor bastard a decent burial. . . ."

Still gripping his stone club, he climbed cautiously up the ladder. It was a retractable one, he saw, that when not in use telescoped into a recess in the hull. He stepped warily through the big circular port. It gave access to a small compartment. On the bulkhead opposite the shell plating was another door. That, too, was open.

The ship was dead. Nothing had worked in her, nobody had been living in her for a long time. Some seamanlike sense told the man this as he clambered up interminable ladders, through the central well of the ship, to the "greenhouse" in the nose that must surely be the control room. There was light of a sort, for all hatches were open and the sun was striking through the glass of the greenhouse. There was enough light for the man to feel that his stone club was an absurd encumbrance, so he dropped it. It fell with a dull, flat thud to the plastic-covered deck.

The control room, in spite of the encrustation of wind-blown dirt on the transparency of its walls, seemed brilliantly lit. The castaway pulled himself up through the last hatch and gazed spellbound upon the glittering complexity of apparatus, the profusion of instruments whose use he could never hope to fathom. He ignored for a while the three skeletons that sat—or had sat, before the decay of ligaments brought collapse—before control panels.

At last he brought himself to examine them. They were all human. There was a little granular litter around their bones, the long-dry droppings of rats. There were shreds of fabric that might once have been clothing. And there was a watch, a wrist watch with a metallic strap. The castaway picked it up. It started to tick almost at once—the faint noise abnormally loud. He looked at it curiously. The dial had Arabic

numerals, one to twenty-four. There was a sweep second hand. He could see no means of winding or setting it.

He put it down beside its owner. The idea of plundering the dead never occurred to him. And then he prowled around the control room staring at the instruments, wishing that he knew who had built this ship, and when. The technology involved must have been far in advance of anything that he had known or heard of. Yet she had obviously been here for years, at least.

He sighed.

He clambered down the ladders into the body of the ship, searching for the storeroom. He found it at last. He could barely see, in the dim light, the little plaque over the door. It said in bold English characters FOOD STORES. He had trouble with the door itself. He finally discovered that it did not open in or out but slid to one side.

There were food containers in there—not of tinned metal but of plastic. The first one that he opened—he pulled a tab and the entire top of the container fell away—contained tomato juice. The second one was asparagus. He restrained himself from running riot among the supplies, opening container after container to sample the contents, and took the two that he had already opened outside where there was more light. There was no maker's label. All there was was a conventionalized picture of the contents in low bas relief, and in raised characters the words TOMATO JUICE and ASPARAGUS.

Replete, but sorely puzzled, he clambered back to the control room. He was determined to find some evidence as to the builders of this ship. Ignoring the skeletons, he searched among the rubbish on the deck. He found what seemed to be the remains of a book. He cursed the rats that had left him no more than the stiff covers, a few torn strips of some smooth plastic between them. But he blew the dust from the cover. He read what was written on it in a bold, firm hand. And refused to believe what he had read.

Log of the Interstellar Ship CENTAURUS, somebody had penned —somewhere. *Voyage* 1. . . .

Insterstellar ship?

The word "Interplanetary" would have brought grudging credence. The word "Interstellar" wasn't yet in Man's practical dictionary.

And yet . . .

He looked at the glittering complexity of instruments, the strange devices—and half believed.

"I must have a look at their engine room," he said aloud.

The engine room was aft. There was almost no machinery as he understood it. There were things that looked like the breeches of enormous guns, from which ran wiring and very fine tubes or pipes. The guns pointed down. It was obvious rocket drive. Atomic? He could not say.

Still not content, he started to climb again up the ladders through the central well. And he saw a door that he had passed on his way down. This time something made him stop to examine it more closely. Faintly shining in the dim light were the words: MANNSCHEN DRIVE UNIT.

Mannschen drive?

He shook his head in puzzlement. The name meant nothing to him —but it must have meant something to the English-speaking humans who had manned this ship. He started to try to open the door. It was jammed. He decided that the investigation would have to wait until later, until he found some means of forcing an entry—and then the door yielded.

It was dark in the compartment behind the door. He saw vague, hulking masses of machinery, mechanisms that seemed to make more sense than that which he had seen in the after engine room. There were wheels and levers, and their curves and straight rigid lines were reassuring.

He wished he could have more light. His hand went up inside the door, found a stud. Unconsciously he pressed it. He cried out when the lights came on. And after he had come to take the miracle of light itself for granted, he still marveled at the efficiency of the storage batteries that had made the miracle possible.

There were bodies in the Mannschen drive room, sprawled before the machine they had served. They weren't skeletons. The tight-shut door had kept out the intruders that had stripped their shipmates elsewhere in the ship. They could have been mummies. The skin, almost black, was stretched taut over the bones of their faces. Their teeth, startlingly white, showed in unpleasant grins. They were still wearing what appeared to be a uniform of sorts. It was simple, mere shorts and shirts that had once been blue, epaulettes upon which shone gold insignia.

The castaway bent to examine the two bodies, his nostrils wrinkling with the odor of slow decay that still hung around them. Then he saw there was a third body behind the machine. He went to examine it, then recoiled hastily. The unlucky man, whoever he had been, had been literally turned inside out.

He had to go outside until he had fought down his rising nausea. When he returned he studiously ignored the bodies, tried to turn all his attention to the enigmatic machine. It was not long before he succeeded. The intricacy of wheels was the most fascinating thing he had ever seen. None of its parts was especially small, yet all had the workmanship associated only with the finest products of the watchmaker's art.

There was a metal plate on one of the four pillars that formed a framework for the machine. It was covered with lettering. It was headed: INSTRUCTIONS FOR OPERATING THE MANNSCHEN INTERSTELLAR DRIVE UNIT. Most of what followed was, to the castaway, gibberish. There was continual reference to something called temporal precession. Whatever it was, it was important.

He found himself remembering the course he had taken, not so long ago, in the operation of gyro compasses. He remembered how a gyroscope will precess at right angles to an applied force. But . . . *temporal precession?*

Yet time, the wise men tell us, is a dimension. . . .

And wasn't there an absurd limerick about it all?

> There was a young fellow called Bright,
> Whose speed was much faster than light;
> He started one day in a relative way—
> And arrived the previous night.

Temporal precession . . . An interstellar drive . . .

It was utterly crazy, but it made a mad kind of sense.

The castaway turned from the incomprehensible machine to its control panel. Many of the switches and buttons upon it were marked with symbols utterly outside the scope of his knowledge. But there were two studs whose functions he could understand. One bore the legend START, and the other one, STOP.

He stood before the panel. His right hand raised itself. He told himself that even though there had been sufficient power in the storage batteries to operate the lighting, there would never be enough to move

one minor part of the complex machine. And the memories of occasions in the past when he had been told not to meddle, not to play with things about which he understood nothing, were deliberately pushed into the background of his mind.

It would be so easy to press the button marked START. It would be just as easy to press that marked STOP if the machine showed signs of getting out of hand.

From the deck the dead men grinned at him.

But he was not looking at them.

His right index finger came up slowly. It stabbed at the starting button. The first joint whitened as he applied pressure. At first nothing happened. Then there was a sharp click. Immediately the lights dimmed, the many wheels of the machine, great and small, started to spin. The castaway turned to look at them, found his gaze caught and held by the largest of the wheels.

It turned slowly at first. It gathered speed. And, spinning, it blurred most strangely. It was a solid wheel, but its outlines faded. The glittering intricacy of those parts of the machine behind it showed with ever-increasing clarity. It was impossible to tear the eyes away from the uncanny spectacle. It seemed that it was dragging the man's vision, the man himself, after it into some unguessable, unplumbable gulf.

He screamed then. But he could not look away, could not break the spell of this devil's machinery. Vivid before his mind's eye was a picture of the man at whom he had not dared to look too closely—the third body. In desperation his hand groped out behind him, fumbled, found the switchboard. He felt a stud beneath his questing fingers. He pressed. There was the same stickiness as before, the same sharp click.

The machinery slowed, spinning reluctantly to a stop. The vanishing, precessing wheel faded slowly back into view. But the castaway did not see this. Possessed by a terror such as he had never known, he had half fallen, half scrambled down the interminable ladders to the airlock; had half fallen, half jumped from there to the ground.

The afternoon sun was blazing hot as he splashed and floundered down the watercourse to the beach. The sight of the sea, an element of which he had at least a partial understanding, did much to calm him. And the sight of a faint smudge of smoke on the horizon, and all that that implied, almost drove the memory of his weird experience from his mind.

He ran up the beach to where the ashes of the fire had been. But the sand, as far as he could see, was clean. But what did it matter that some freak sea had swept away a handful or so of useless rubbish? Working with calm haste he burrowed into the jungle verge, emerged with armfuls of dry and partially dry sticks and leaves. As he piled up his beacon he glanced at frequent intervals to seaward. He could see the ship herself now, could see that her course would take her not more than three miles from the island.

He finished off his pile of inflammables with green branches and leaves. He knelt in the lee of it, with trembling hands fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco pouch and lighter. He got the lighter out, snapped back the cover. His thumb flicked the wheel, the wick caught at once, its faint, pale flame almost invisible in the bright sunlight.

And the lowermost layers of vegetable refuse smoked and smoldered ever so little—but refused to burn.

The castaway extinguished the lighter flame. He tore off his shirt. The garment was old and threadbare, ripped as he pulled it savagely over his head. But it was ideally suited to his present purpose. He clawed out a hollow in the sand at the base of the reluctant bonfire and stuffed the cloth into it, careful to see that it was not packed too tightly.

This time the lighter was slow to function. His thumb was almost raw before he succeeded in producing a feeble, flickering flame. But the shirt caught at the first touch of fire. In what seemed to be an incredibly short space of time the flames were licking up through the dry wood to the green stuff on top, the pillar of brown smoke was climbing up into the blue sky.

At first the castaway danced and waved beside his signal fire; then as the ship drew nearer he fell silent and motionless. He stared hard at the approaching rescuers. The beginnings of panic were making his heart pump violently.

It was the funnel that frightened him. He could see it plainly now—clean fresh cream paint slapped on over crudely vivid red lead. . . .

The water, that at first had been so warm, enveloped him with a cold embrace that contracted his muscles, that threatened to squeeze his heart itself to a standstill. The salt mouthfuls that he was now swallowing with almost every stroke choked him and seared his lungs. The smarting eyes were blind, no longer staring toward the yellow line of beach that, at the beginning of it all, had seemed so close. . . .

Marion Gross

THE GOOD PROVIDER

Here we meet our second Garret Inventor (or Mad Scientist)—only this one invents in the basement. Unlike the philosophic-scientific gadget of Murray Leinster's Mr. Binder, the one developed here by Miss Gross's Mr. Leggety does turn out to be mildly useful—to Mrs. Leggety. . . .

Incidentally, this was the first story ever published by Miss Gross, according to the editors of the magazine in which it originally appeared. We hope that it is a forerunner of many equally delightful tales from her quietly fey pen.

MINNIE LEGGETY turned up the walk of her Elm Street bungalow and saw that she faced another crisis. When Omar sat brooding like that, not smoking, not "studying," but just scrunched down inside of himself, she knew enough after forty years to realize that she was facing a crisis. As though it weren't enough just trying to get along on Omar's pension these days, without having to baby him through another one of his periods of discouragement! She forced a gaiety into her voice that she actually didn't feel.

"Why, hello there, Pa, what are you doing out here? Did you have to come up for air?" Minnie eased herself down beside Omar on the stoop and put the paper bag she had been carrying on the sidewalk. Such a little bag, but it had taken most of their week's food budget! Protein, plenty of lean, rare steaks and chops, that's what that nice man on the radio said old folks needed, but as long as he couldn't tell you how to buy it with steak at $1.23 a pound, he might just as well save his breath to cool his porridge. And so might she, for all the attention Omar was paying her. He was staring straight ahead as though he didn't even see her. This looked like one of his real bad spells. She took his gnarled hand and patted it.

"What's the matter, Pa? Struck a snag with your gadget?" The "gadget" filled three full walls of the basement and most of the floor space besides, but it was still a "gadget" to Minnie—another one of his ideas that didn't quite work.

Omar had been working on gadgets ever since they were married. When they were younger, she hotly sprang to his defense against her sisters-in-law: "Well, it's better than liquor, and it's cheaper than pinochle; at least I know where he is nights." Now that they were older, and Omar was retired from his job, his tinkering took on a new significance. It was what kept him from going to pieces like a lot of men who were retired and didn't have enough activity to fill their time and their minds.

"What's the matter, Pa?" she asked again.

The old man seemed to notice her for the first time. Sadly he shook his head. "Minnie, I'm a failure. The thing's no good; it ain't practical. After all I promised you, Minnie, and the way you stuck by me and all, it's just not going to work."

Minnie never had thought it would. It just didn't seem possible that a body could go gallivanting back and forth the way Pa had said they would if the gadget worked. She continued to pat the hand she held and told him soothingly, "I'm not sure but it's for the best, Pa. I'd sure have gotten airsick, or timesick or whatever it was. What're you going to work on now that you're giving up the time machine?" she asked anxiously.

"You don't understand, Min," the old man said. "I'm through. I've failed. I've failed at everything I've ever tried to make. They always *almost* work, and yet there's always something I can't get just right. I never knew enough, Min, never had enough schooling, and now it's too late to get any. I'm just giving up altogether. I'm through!"

This *was* serious. Pa with nothing to tinker at down in the basement, Pa constantly underfoot, Pa with nothing to keep him from just slipping away like old Mr. Mason had, was something she didn't like to think about. "Maybe it isn't as bad as all that," she told him. "All those nice parts you put into your gadget, maybe you could make us a television or something with them. Land, a television, that would be a nice thing to have."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, Min. I wouldn't know how to make a television; besides, I told you, it almost works. It's just that it ain't practical. It ain't the way I pictured it. Come down, I'll show you." He dragged her into the house and down into the basement.

The time machine left so little free floor space, what with the furnace and coal bin and washtubs, that Minnie had to stand on the stairway while Pa explained it to her. It needed explanation. It had more

colored lights than a pinball machine, more plugs than the Hillsdale telephone exchange, and more levers than one of those newfangled voting booths.

"Now see," he said, pointing to various parts of the machine, "I rigged this thing up so we could move forward or back in time and space both. I thought we could go off and visit foreign spots, and see great things happening, and have ourselves an interesting old age."

"Well, I don't rightly know if I'd have enjoyed that, Pa," Minnie interrupted. "I doubt I'd know how to get along with all them foreigners, and their strange talk and strange ways and all."

Omar shook his head in annoyance. "The Holy Land. You'd have wanted to see the Holy Land, wouldn't you? You could have sat with the crowd at Galilee and listened to the Lord's words right from His lips. You'd have enjoyed that, wouldn't you?"

"Omar, when you talk like that you make the whole thing sound sacrilegious and against the Lord's ways. Besides, I suppose the Lord would have spoke in Hebrew, and I don't know one word of that and you don't either. I don't know but what I'm glad you couldn't get the thing to work," she said righteously.

"But Min, it does work!" Omar was indignant.

"But you said—"

"I never said it don't work. I said it ain't practical. It don't work good enough, and I don't know enough to make it work better."

Working on the gadget was one thing, but believing that it worked was another. Minnie began to be alarmed. Maybe folks had been right, maybe Omar had gone off his head at last. She looked at him anxiously. He seemed all right, and now that he was worked up at her, the depression seemed to have left him.

"What do you mean it works, but not good enough?" she asked him.

"Well, see here," Omar told her, pointing to an elaborate control board. "It was like I was telling you before you interrupted with your not getting along with foreigners, and your sacrilege and all. I set this thing up to move a body in time and space any which way. There's a globe of the world worked in here and I thought that by turning the globe, and setting these time controls to whatever year you had in mind, you could go wherever you had a mind to. Well, it don't work like that. I've been trying it out for a whole week and no matter how I set the globe, no matter how I set the time controls, it

always comes out the same. It lands me over at Main and Center, right in front of Purdey's meat market."

"What's wrong with that?" Minnie asked. "That might be real convenient."

"You don't understand," Omar told her. "It isn't *now* when I get there, it's twenty years ago! That's the trouble, it don't take me none of the places I want to go, just Main and Center. And it don't take me none of the times I want to go, just twenty years ago, and I saw enough of the depression so I don't want to spend my old age watching people sell apples. Then on top of that, this here timer don't work." He pointed to another dial. "It's supposed to set to how long you want to stay, wherever you want to go, but it don't work at all. Twenty minutes, and then woosh, you're right back here in the basement. Nothing works like I want it to."

Minnie had grown thoughtful as Omar recounted the faults of the machine. Wasn't it a caution the way even a smart man like Pa, a man smart enough to make a time machine, didn't have a practical ounce to his whole hundred and forty-eight pounds? She sat down heavily on the cellar steps and, emptying the contents of her purse on her broad lap, began examining the bills.

"What you looking for, Min?" Omar asked.

Minnie looked at him pityingly. Wasn't it a caution . . .

Purdey the butcher was leaning unhappily against his chopping block. The shop was clean and shining, the floor was strewn with fresh sawdust, and Purdey himself, unmindful of the expense, had for the sake of his morale donned a fresh apron. But for all that Purdey wished that he was hanging on one of his chromium-plated meat hooks.

The sky was blue and smogless, something it never was when the shops were operating and employing the valley's five thousand breadwinners. Such potential customers as were abroad had a shabby, threadbare look to them. Over in front of the Bijou old Mr. Ryan was selling apples.

While he watched, a stout, determined-looking woman appeared at the corner of Main and Center. She glanced quickly around, brushing old Mr. Ryan and his apples with her glance, and then came briskly toward Purdey's shop. Purdey straightened up.

"Afternoon, Ma'am, what can I do for you?" He beamed as though the light bill weren't three months overdue.

"I'll have a nice porterhouse," the lady said hesitantly. "How much is porterhouse?"

"Forty-five a pound, best in the house." Purdey held up a beauty, expecting her to change her mind.

"I'll take it," the lady said. "And six lamb chops. I want a rib roast for Sunday, but I can come back for that. No use carrying too much," she explained. "Could you please hurry with that? I haven't very much time."

"New in town?" Purdey asked as he turned to ring up the sale on the cash register.

"Yes, you might say so," the woman said. By the time Purdey turned back to ask her her name, she was gone. But Purdey knew she'd be back. She wanted a rib roast for Sunday. "It just goes to show you," Purdey said to himself, surveying the satisfactory tab sticking up from the register, "there still is some money around. Two dollars, and she never even batted an eyelash. It goes to show you!"

Amelia R. Long

REVERSE PHYLOGENY

I have always been fond of this story, by a lady otherwise better known for her whodunits, not only for its unique plot and idea but for its delightfully screwball characters. Science fiction is not always successful when it attempts the light touch, but it's my feeling that this one brings it off very well.

The story is time travel only by courtesy, I suppose; which is another good reason for its inclusion here. It is actually our only example of "subjective" travel in the time dimension: the protagonists remain right with us while they "see" the past and are able to report its mysteries—and its terrors. Even this seemingly safe-and-sane method of temporal voyaging turns out to have its unexpected hazards, though. . . .

ONCE more I have before me the task of explaining to the public another of the escapades of my friend, Professor Aloysius O'Flannigan. Not that Aloysius has asked me to do so; he is far too proud for that. But when—because of a minor incident that had no place in his original plan, and for which he can in no way be held responsible—remarks are made that the whole experiment concerning the lost continent of Atlantis had a decidedly fishy flavor, and when certain malicious-tongued individuals begin to accuse an inoffensive, peace-loving man like Aloysius of deliberately attempting to drown Mr. Theophilus Black on dry land, it seems to me that in mere fairness something ought to be done about it.

It all began with a series of articles of a well-known science magazine, of which Aloysius is an ardent reader. Dropping into his library one day, I found him sitting cross-legged upon the floor, with several copies of the magazine strewn around him. As I entered, he glanced up, made a dive for one of the magazines, and thrust it at me.

"Eric, I want you to read this!" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming behind his thick-lensed spectacles. "Then tell me what you think of it."

He had turned the magazine open at an article entitled "Atlantis; Proof of Its Existence," written by a Mr. Theophilus Black. It was a well-constructed article, exhibiting excellent imaginative qualities and, to my mind at least, quite a bit of erudition on the part of its author. As

I finished it and was about to comment, Aloysius pushed a second magazine into my hand.

"Read this before you say anything," he directed. "Then give me your reaction to both of them."

The article in the second magazine was called "Atlantis Debunked"; and it lived up to its title. I read it as Aloysius directed; and, whereas only a few minutes before, Mr. Black had had me ready to swallow the whole continent of Atlantis, Mr. Kenneth McScribe, the author of the second article, now had me gagging on the first pebble. I looked helplessly at Aloysius, feeling a trifle groggy.

"There are several other articles here, but you needn't go into them," he said understandingly. "But what do you think of the Atlantis theory as a whole?"

"I hardly know," I answered, trying to sort out my jumbled reactions. "There seem to be equally good arguments on both sides."

"That's what I felt, too." He nodded. "Mr. Black's logic is excellent, but he builds it upon a rather porous situation, upon which Mr. McScribe has very cleverly turned a microscope. But, in his enthusiasm, Mr. McScribe has used too powerful a lens, and blurred matters a little. For example"—he picked up one of the magazines and selected a particular paragraph—"Mr. McScribe would throw out the evidence of the air-cooled volcanic rocks found in the Atlantic Ocean because Mr. Black cannot quote their geological age. I fail to see where their age has a great deal to do with it. After all, the question is not *when* Atlantis might have existed, but *whether* it existed at any time."

"True," I agreed hopefully. "And the very existence of those rocks is a strong indication—"

"Not so fast!" he broke in. "The existence of those rocks need indicate nothing more than a now-submerged island, and it's going a little strong to construct a whole continent out of that—a little like making a mountain out of a molehill, on an exalted scale."

"You have the darndest way of switching from one side of a question to another!" I complained. "A fellow can't tell whether you actually turn the corners, or just wander in a circle."

"I'm afraid you haven't got the scientific mind, Eric." He sighed. "What I'm trying to do is sift the evidence."

"And what have you found so far?" I inquired with a touch of sarcasm.

"Not much, I'm afraid," he admitted. "You see, both Mr. Black and

Mr. McScribe have made the same error of arguing over material evidence: such things as similarity of place names on both sides of the Atlantic, prehistoric remains, social development, and the like. They should look for psychological indications: racial characteristics or instincts in man himself that would either prove or disprove his descent from inhabitants of a continent—"

He broke off in midsentence, and a rapt expression came over his face. "Divil an' all!" he exclaimed, slapping his right fist into the palm of his left hand. "I believe it could be done; I'm going to try it!"

"Now what?" I asked a little fearfully, knowing from past experience that when Aloysius used that tone anything might be expected to happen.

"I'm going to awaken racial memory," he replied. "After all, our so-called instincts are nothing more than inherited race memory, as any psychologist will tell you. If those dormant memories can be aroused, brought up from the unconscious into the conscious mind and—"

"But how can it be done?" I wanted to know.

"Through hypnotism, of course," he answered. "I could turn the mind of a subject back through the deep strata of instinct bequeathed to him by his ancestors, inducing him to relive them as if they were a part of his own experience, until we had discovered whether there was or was not an Atlantean layer. Why, we might even settle the moot question of whether mental traits can be inherited!"

There are times, I reflected, when nothing else in the English language is so expressive as the single word "Nuts." But I said nothing, hoping that he would work off his enthusiasm by writing a letter to the magazine. I should have known better.

It was only a week later that he sent for me to come around again. Upon arriving at his house, I found that he already had three other guests: two very scholarly-looking gentlemen and a full-blooded Indian, feathers and all.

"Eric," he said, "I want you to meet Mr. Black, Mr. McScribe, and Chief Rain-in-the-Face. Gentlemen, my friend and sometimes colleague, Mr. Dale."

Mr. Black and Mr. McScribe acknowledged the introduction with the usual polite phrases.

Chief Rain-in-the-Face (ah! the appropriateness of that name!) confined himself to a noncommittal "Ugh."

As for me, I'm afraid I let my jaw fall open rather foolishly.

"I wrote to Mr. Black and Mr. McScribe about my planned experiment to settle the Atlantis question," Aloysius went on, "and they very graciously consented to act as subjects. The fact that they are on opposite sides in the debate will give added significance to our findings."

"I see," I managed a trifle weakly. "And where does—er—Chief Rain-in-the-Face come in?"

"In order to prove or disprove Mr. Black's contention that the first settlers on the American continent were from Atlantis, it was necessary that a genuine Indian take part in the experiment," he explained. "Of course, in order to be really scientific we should have an Egyptian as well, but none was procurable. However, Mr. Black is convinced that his earliest forebears were Atlanteans; so that will have to suffice.

"And now, gentlemen," he continued, "if you are ready, we will begin the first step. Eric, you will act as witness and recording secretary."

He lined his subjects up in chairs facing him, and, after a few minutes, succeeded in placing all three of them in a state of deep hypnosis. He then undertook, by suggestion, to turn their minds backward through the layers of inherited instinct, making them relive their "race memories," as he called them, as actual experiences.

I will say this much for what followed: It was extremely interesting and would have convinced the Reincarnationists that their day of justification had arrived. During the next two hours, Chief Rain-in-the-Face told us all about what had happened to Henry Hudson after he had sailed on his last voyage up the river that now bears his name, while Mr. Black and Mr. McScribe furnished us with some interesting sidelights in the lives of several prominent personages at the courts of Louis XIV and Henry VIII respectively. All in all, it was a morning well spent.

Upon being awakened, none of the three men retained any memory of his mental experiences while in the hypnotic state, and they were exceedingly surprised when I read my notes to them. At Aloysius' request, they all promised to return the next day, when the experiment would be continued.

"Of course, today was only the beginning," Aloysius said when we were alone. "A mere scratching of the surface. Tomorrow we will go deeper, and the next day deeper still, until eventually we reach the level that will prove conclusively from what source these races have sprung."

"I hope you're not claiming that today's performance had anything

to do with instinct," I remarked. "Why, the very latest of our instincts was developed long before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, according to your own statement, instinct is *race* memory. What these men related today were the experiences of single individuals."

"I know that," he admitted, unperturbed. "But it only goes to verify another theory of mine. For a long time I have believed that the life experiences of our not-too-distant ancestors are inherited in certain cells of the brain, just as their physical characteristics are duplicated in our bodies. They bear the same relationship to racial memory that family resemblance bears to racial resemblance. For example, it—"

"Never mind the example," I cut in. "I'll probably understand better without it. And now, if I may speak figuratively, how long in this experiment of yours before we get through the topsoil and strike bedrock?"

"Oh, about two weeks," he replied. "Incidentally, I like your metaphor. It has such a—er—archaeological flavor."

I will not go into a detailed account of all the subsequent steps in the experiment, but will note only the high lights. There was, for instance, the time when Chief Rain-in-the-Face went on the warpath and attempted to translate his mental experience into physical action with the aid of the table lamp and a letter opener. He entirely wrecked the experiment for that day, and had to be brought out of his hypnotic trance by the somewhat crude means of a crack over the head with a volume of the encyclopedia.

Then there was the time when Mr. McScribe thought he was with Joshua before the walls of Jericho, and insisted upon going out and marching around the block until the policeman on the beat picked him up as a suspicious character.

It was this incident, together with the explanation it entailed, that was responsible for bringing the whole affair to the attention of the public. When we went to the police station to collect Mr. McScribe, an overenterprising reporter was present; and that evening the story, embellished with lurid details, appeared in his paper. The result was that the next morning representatives of every newspaper in the city descended upon us.

Now, Aloysius is retiring by nature, and at first he refused to have anything to do with them. But it is easier to rid oneself of dandruff than of the gentlemen of the press. By sheer persistence they wore him

down, until at last he consented to their being present at the next experiment.

By this time he had got back to the early Egyptian period and had actually begun to accomplish things with race memory. The reporters were duly impressed, and when their stories appeared, the reading public got its money's worth. Interest in the subject became so acute that the editor of the paper that carried the first story got the brilliant idea that the remainder of the experiment be put on in a public auditorium, the affair to be sponsored by his newspaper.

Naturally, Aloysius would have refused anything so spectacular, had not both Mr. Black and Mr. McScribe intervened. What weight, they argued, would our findings carry if they could be attested to by only one or two men? For the sake of science, the final steps should be taken before a sufficient number of witnesses, so that the outcome could never be doubted. The argument undeniably had its points; and at last in spite of his better judgment, Aloysius gave in.

It was arranged for the final stage of the experiment to be conducted in the city's largest auditorium. Free tickets could be had by taking a year's subscription to the sponsoring newspaper; and the public's response would have turned Barnum green with envy. Within three days every seat in the house had been taken, and tickets for standing room were being issued on six months' subscriptions.

At last the fatal night came when, according to the best calculations, the Atlantean strata in the unconscious minds of the three subjects should be reached. Aloysius had planned to skip a few thousand years in order to get, if possible, a description of Atlantis in its heyday, then to work up gradually to the great inundation. It would, he explained, make the experiment more understandable to the audience.

I think that, of the two of us, I was the more nervous. Experience had taught me that Aloysius' experiments quite frequently ended in unforeseen results, and I did not relish the thought of how so large an audience might react in such a case. I even urged him to have a sort of dress rehearsal in private, but he refused.

"No, Eric," he said firmly. "If I did that, tonight's performance would not be a true experiment but merely a demonstration of something already proven. I am a man of my word and must give these people what I promised."

"But suppose there was no continent of Atlantis," I argued. "Then what?"

"In that case," he replied, unruffled, "we will have proven Mr. McScribe's contention."

I saw that there was nothing I could do, so I gave up.

Promptly at eight o'clock, Aloysius stepped out upon the stage and explained to a packed and eager house what he proposed to do. He was followed by Mr. Black and Mr. McScribe, who, in turn, stated their positions in the matter.

Chief Rain-in-the-Face, upon being introduced next, confined himself to the usual noncommittal "Ugh," since the purpose of the whole affair was still a little hazy in his mind.

Amid a silence heavy enough to be weighed, Aloysius proceeded to place his three subjects in a state of hypnosis. He had explained that the best results might be expected from Mr. Black, since he alone, once the mental transfer to the remote past had been made, seemed able to translate his awakened race memories into the language of the present. Chief Rain-in-the-Face, when under the hypnotic influence, spoke his native Indian language; while on the last two occasions, Mr. McScribe had emitted only a kind of unintelligible jabbering suggestive of an anthropoid ape.

As soon as the hypnotic trance was deep enough, Aloysius addressed the three collectively, informing them that they were now living before the dawn of recorded history, in approximately the year 20,000 B.C., and directing them to describe their experiences. There followed a minute of tense expectancy, during which a subtle change seemed to take place in all three men.

Then Chief Rain-in-the-Face rose and delivered a spirited oration in a language that resembled none known on earth today, after which he bowed formally and resumed his seat.

The audience understood not a word of what he had said, and accordingly was duly impressed. Aloysius raised his hand to check applause that he saw was about to break forth, and turned to Mr. Black.

"Now, Theophilus Black, tell us where you are and what you see."

The reply came at once, but the words were spoken slowly, as if the speaker was obliged to translate his thoughts into a tongue with which he was unfamiliar.

"I am in a great city—the capital of the civilized world. On all sides,

tall white buildings rear themselves toward the sky, while the streets are thronged with busy people. There are also many horse-drawn chariots, but each year these grow fewer, for recently there has been invented a chariot that runs without horses. Since the invention of this horseless chariot, the pedestrians, too, have grown fewer. The land is rich and powerful, and its scientists are the greatest the world has ever known."

"What is the name of this land?" Aloysius put in, endeavoring to control his excitement. So far, results were turning out far better than they had before.

There was a brief pause; Mr. Black then said, "Its native name would mean nothing to you, but it has come down to you in legend as Atlantis."

A unanimous gasp arose from the audience. The authenticity of the mythical Atlantis was actually being proven! At this very moment, the man before them had returned there mentally through awakened race memory! No wonder they were excited and thrilled. I was myself.

"I have said that our scientists are the greatest the world has ever known," Mr. Black went on in the same hesitant, rather monotonous voice. "But recently they have fallen into disrepute, and all because they have predicted that which it does not please the people to believe.

"For many years we have known that the ocean bottom is rising. Our own coastal plains have been sinking, while our mariners report that in the distant reaches of both the eastern and western oceans, strange new islands have appeared. Our scientists have studied these reports and announced that the appearance of the islands mark the beginning of a great cataclysm of nature which will raise new continents from the ocean bottom, pouring the waters that now cover them over Atlantis, burying it forever. Naturally, the people are loath to accept such a prediction, for it seems to them impossible that Atlantis, the wise and beautiful, could ever perish."

"Does no one believe the scientists?" Aloysius asked.

"None but a few religious sects, who believe that the end of the world has been predicted. One of our merchants has taken advantage of their credulity and has advertised in his shop a special sale of fine linen for ascension robes."

"When do the scientists predict that this great catastrophe will take place?"

"They say that it will occur about ten years from now."

Aloysius waited several seconds before speaking again. Then he said, "Six years have passed. The catastrophe is only four years away. Tell us what is happening in Atlantis now."

The reply came promptly. "Earthquakes have begun to shake our land. Two volcanoes have become active. The ocean bottom to the east and west is rising rapidly."

"Do the people still doubt the predictions of the scientists?"

"A few more have ceased to doubt. These are building large boats in which, if the water begins to rise over the land, they will flee to the small, barbarous continent of Yropa to the northeast. The boats are very large. They will carry animals and supplies as well as men and women."

"Blast me eyes!" exclaimed an awed British voice from the balcony. "A whole fleet of bloomin' Noah's arks!"

Aloysius gestured sternly for silence, and returned to his subject. "Now three more years have gone by. The disaster is only one year away."

The audience leaned forward breathlessly to catch the answer. This time the voice that delivered it was strained and tense.

"The sky is dark with the ashes from the volcanoes. Whole cities have been destroyed by earthquakes. Reports reach us that the sea has rushed in over a portion of Yropa, creating a large island off the west coast, where before was a peninsula. Also, a large tract of land shaped like a boot has arisen out of the sea on the south of Yropa.

"At last the people of Atlantis believe that the scientists predicted correctly, but now it is too late. Most of the boats have already departed to establish colonies in Yropa and other barbarous places. As for the others, their captains grow rich conducting one-way excursions to the new islands. Atlantis is a doomed continent."

The voice moaned away into silence, like the last gasp of the dying civilization it described. It was echoed by the audibly released breath of the gallery.

From my place in the wings I tried to catch Aloysius' eye. Surely the experiment had gone far enough, and it was now time to awaken the subjects. Besides, during the last few minutes Chief Rain-in-the-Face had shown distinct signs of restlessness, as if he was passing through the same mental experiences as Mr. Black but was unable to express himself. To keep him in the hypnotic state much longer might lead to complications.

But Aloysius had not yet finished. A gleam came into his eyes that I knew only too well; he braced himself to launch the real climax of his experiment. "The hour of catastrophe has come!" he cried in ringing tones. "Atlantis is sinking! The waters are closing over it! Tell me what you see."

There was a moment of electric tension so strong it could have charged a battery. Then the answer came, but this time it was not in words but in actions.

Before anyone fully realized what was happening, Chief Rain-in-the-Face had leaped from his chair. The next instant he was heading for the edge of the platform, while his arms flailed about in perfect imitation of an English Channel swimmer. Pausing on the platform's edge for only a split second, he executed a perfect swan dive into the lap of an obese lady in the front row!

Instantly pandemonium broke loose. Women screamed and men shouted. There was a mad stampede for the exits, in which everybody seemed to get in everybody else's way. One well-meaning soul, attempting to switch on more lights, pressed the wrong button—with the result that he turned on the emergency fire sprinkler instead, and streams of water began to spurt in all directions. We learned afterward that this caused several people to believe that the entire company had actually been translated bodily as well as mentally to sinking Atlantis and were going down with it.

In vain, Aloysius entreated the crowd to be calm, assuring them that everything was all right. However, those people had but one thought in mind: to get out of there—quickly, while they still had their scalps.

In the excitement, the two other subjects of the experiment had been completely forgotten; and it is painful to contemplate what might have been the fate of at least one of them had not a faint, gurgling sound attracted my attention. I went to investigate. There was poor Mr. Black flapping about helplessly in his chair, emitting the most awful gaspings and groanings, like a man in the last stages of drowning.

"Aloysius!" I bellowed, striving to make myself heard above the surrounding din. "You've got to get Black out of the Atlantis period, quick! The poor devil can't swim!"

Leaving the auditorium to attendants and the police, who had arrived by this time to look after the commotion in front, we rushed to the assistance of Mr. Black; while Mr. McScribe peered out at us from beneath the speaker's table, a perfect example of the atavistic cave

man gone to cover. Our star subject was in pretty bad shape; and even after he had been awakened from the hypnosis, it was necessary to administer artificial respiration.

After the excitement was all over and Aloysius had been warned, by an irate police sergeant, that "if there's any more av this foolishness, Professor O'Flannigan, ye'll find yerself in a cage with the rest of the monkeys," we were allowed to go home.

To my surprise, Aloysius was not nearly so downcast as I had expected. "I'll admit that matters did get a little out of hand toward the end," he said philosophically. "But in spite of that, the experiment was a success. We certainly proved the onetime existence of Atlantis."

"I'm not so sure," I replied sourly. "I heard a couple of reporters say that the whole thing could be explained by pure mental suggestion."

Aloysius merely smiled. "Of course, there will always be skeptics," he said. "But I have material proof that cannot be explained away."

"*Material* proof?" I repeated. "What in the world do you mean?"

"For a long time," he began, "certain scientists have maintained that there exist ultra dimensions in time and space which, if they were thoroughly understood, could be passed through physically as well as mentally. Now, don't ask me how, for I'm not a mathematician. All I know is that, in some way, Mr. Black's mental rapport with the past became so strong that he was able to draw through these dimensions an actual, material specimen from the sinking continent of Atlantis. I took it from his mouth when we were reviving him. Here it is."

He put his hand into his pocket and drew out—by the tail—a little dead fish!

I stared at it incredulously. "Holy mackerel!" I gasped.

Aloysius shook his head. "No, Eric," he corrected, with his usual care for scientific accuracy, "just a sucker."

OTHER TRACKS

It is dangerous to make flat statements about priorities in the science-fiction field, because someone is likely to pop up in the back row and contradict you—with evidence. However, to my knowledge this is the first story ever written that assumed that if you did *achieve time travel backward, you never could get back to the same world you left. It might seem almost the same, but some things would be different—things that changed as a result of your impingement on the fabric of the past, no matter how slight it was.*

The idea has been used many times, of course, since this story was written. But the original is still as fresh as many of the more recent versions. . . . As far as the record shows, this was the only science-fiction story ever to appear under the name "William Sell." Letters sent to the only address available for Mr. Sell were returned unclaimed. If the author comes across this note, will he please get in touch with the editor? He has a bit of business to transact which will be to Mr. Sell's advantage!

CAUTIOUSLY, Tom Garmot set his foot down on the board. That *was* the one. It squeaked. Garmot removed his foot hastily and stepped on the next one. He eased the compact, heavy case to the floor with a suppressed grunt, and, silent in the dim glow from the street lamp outside the locked laboratory, motioned to Charlie Thorne, his nephew, to deposit the similar case he carried.

Garmot slipped a key into the lock on the door marked "Dr. William R. Laddo. Electronic Research Department. Taggert Foundation."

"If," said Garmot softly but intensely, "Laddo shows up by some mischance, I hope you've got as persuasive a tongue with him as you had with me."

Thorne chuckled almost silently. "You know darn well you wanted to try out that battery of yours. You didn't take much persuading."

"Laddo'll take a lot if he finds me trying my battery on his pet gadget. Come on, and skip that board."

They oozed into the laboratory and locked the door. Being designed

to permit the observation of experiments on light during daylight hours, it was admirably adapted to night invasion. Garmot turned on the ceiling light. Thorne put down the battery cases with a mild snort. "It's an unhandsome-looking assemblage of spare parts."

"But if it does what Laddo wants it to—!"

"If." Thorne grinned. "He shouldn't complain. If your new battery has the kick you say—"

"It has," snapped Garmot. Then, mournfully, "And Laddo has even more kick if he finds his honest, trustworthy assistant messing around here at night."

"His great theory won't work unless he gets a battery with power enough. I'd love to see him driving his apparatus from the power mains while it gradually retreated in the general direction of the year 1. The power mains don't run in that direction. And, from what you say, the lead-acid batteries he has won't, either. What's his objection if yours makes it work?"

Garmot grinned unhappily. "You," he explained, "don't know Laddo. He's not vicious, just sarcastic. Cut the chatter and help me. These cells are heavy. Yes—that lead here. Put the old cell— Oh, ye gods! I forgot! He had these cells made up by a French firm, and they put a left-hand thread on the posts. Can't be helped. I'll have to use a jumper."

"Now what?" demanded Thorne.

"The skylight. We go out that way—straight up. If we go. And we go *only* straight up and down. You argued me into trying it this far, but you can argue with Laddo if you want a ride through Time. Open the skylight and pile in here."

The two men crawled in among the maze of stainless-steel tube framework, power leads, and small motors and tubes. Garmot touched a switch, and four small motors hummed momentarily; four helicopter blades overhead rocked the framework. He turned on a small instrument light, snapped off the overhead light, and re-entered the machine.

"Everything looks O.K. Are you ready?"

"Sure. Give her the gun."

Garmot pushed the control, and a hum arose from below the floor boards. As it increased to a whine, they could feel they were ascending. Before he could cut down the power they were several hundred feet above the laboratory, dimly white below them.

"Man, this is great," said Thorne. "I hope you know how to get down."

"Sure. We just cut the power off gradually and she'll settle right down. It works all right, doesn't it? I knew my batteries would do it. You can see all over town from here, can't you?"

"Yeah. But why do you have to get up in the air before you go ahead in Time? I forgot to ask you at the house."

"Suppose we went ahead in Time, and there was something solid in the way? What would happen to us? This way we get above all possible obstructions, and if we went to the year 5000, say, all we'd have to do would be to float gently to the ground when we got there."

"I see. And which is the lever that would send us to the year 5000?"

"This one. But keep your fingers away. If you touch it, there's no telling—ugh."

Charlie, in his examination, had, perhaps inadvertently, pushed the lever slightly to the left.

A sudden slight *compression,* totally beyond past experience, momentarily seized them, evidence of acceleration into another dimension. Garmot was too surprised to do anything but gasp. But he immediately realized what had happened and forced himself to bring the lever back to neutral. Compression gave way to *expansion.* Then they felt normal.

"Lord, Charlie, what have you done?"

"I guess I touched the lever a little. We seem to be all right, though. There is the lab right below us."

"Yes, and I'm going down. Keep away from the levers."

Tom cut the power down, and the machine slowly descended. But Charlie, looking over the side, called excitedly, "Stop it, Tom! Somebody has closed the skylight. Hey—there's no skylight there!"

Garmot hastily turned on power until the machine again hovered, and cautiously ventured a look. Charlie was right. There was no skylight for them to enter.

"We'll have to land on the ground and figure this out," he decided. Operating other controls, he guided the machine uncertainly to the apparently deserted lawn. With a slight jar it touched the ground. He cut off the power.

"Can't afford to exhaust the battery staying in the air," he explained to Charlie, who was uncommonly quiet. "Now, let's see," he went on, "what we are up against."

Charlie touched his arm. "Shhh," he warned, "somebody's coming."

Around a clump of shrubbery a dark figure approached. In the darkness the two adventurers kept silent. Perhaps he would pass without noticing them. But no. Turning his flashlight toward them, he called, "What have we got here?"

Tom nudged Charlie. "Keep quiet, kid." To the visitor he said, "Just an accident. Our machine made a forced landing here."

"Well, I'm the watchman here." Tom was surprised; the laboratory hadn't employed a watchman since he'd been there. "What sort of a machine have you got? I never saw an airplane as small as that before. Where'd you come from?"

"This is an experimental job, officer," Tom told him. "Where are we?"

"You're on the grounds of the Taggert Foundation."

"What time is it?"

The watchman turned his flashlight on his watch. "Half-past three," he said. Charlie, in the glare of the light, had seen a familiar decoration on the watchman's coat. "I see you're wearing the Landon sunflower," he said.

"Yes," the watchman replied, "they'll all be wearing sunflowers in November."

"Hunh?" Charlie ejaculated. "Don't you know the election has been over for two years?"

The watchman looked at him sourly.

"Is that so? Are you sure it was an airfield and not an asylum you came from?"

In spite of Tom's attempt to hush him, Charlie would go on. "You're the one who is crazy. Don't you know all the sunflowers died when Roosevelt was re-elected?"

Garmot broke in. "Don't mind him, officer. He's kinda hipped on politics." He turned to Charlie and whispered, "Can it, will you! We've traveled back through Time about two years—they haven't had the election yet. Hold tight. I'm going up." Then, aloud, "I think the machine is fixed now. Thanks, officer," and he turned the switch. To the astonished watchman, the machine appeared to vanish into the night.

From two hundred feet above, Charlie could see his light searching the lawn. He cupped his hands and yelled down, "Roosevelt will carry every state but Maine and Vermont. Don't forget it—Maine and Vermont."

Tom was too busy to stop him. When he judged he was sufficiently

high, he braced himself and carefully eased the time lever over. With his eye on the meter, he waited until it again pointed to zero. At that instant he pushed the lever into neutral.

Anxiously they looked down. Below, in the dim light, an open skylight yawned as before. With a sigh of relief Tom cut the power and gently guided the machine down into the opening.

They were again in the laboratory. Without a word, as if this had been rehearsed, Charlie closed the skylight and held his flashlight while Tom disconnected and removed the new battery. Reconnecting the old one, each picked up his load and cautiously left the building.

On their way home Charlie began asking questions, but Tom was in no mood to answer them. He was too busy thinking. As they reached the apartment he roused himself sufficiently to say, "Don't say anything more about it tonight, Charlie. My head is still swimming. We'll think about it, and tomorrow evening we can talk all night."

The next day was Saturday, and Garmot was glad of it, for he was planning on seeing a patent attorney in the afternoon. His battery passed its trials. When he entered the laboratory, Laddo was already there, examining the machine. He called to Tom.

"Come here, Garmot. There is something peculiar about this chrome plate."

Tom looked at it. The cage appeared the same as ever. "That's nickel plate, not chrome."

"So I perceive. I ordered chromium, and understood that is what you obtained."

Tom was about to tell him that he had specifically ordered nickel, when he glanced at Laddo's face. There was a month-old mustache that had not been there the day before. Surely, anyone who took himself as seriously as Dr. Laddo would not wear a false mustache. He stared, bewildered.

"What's the matter, Garmot? Drunk?" asked Laddo crisply. Tom turned away, not yet able to answer the doctor's questions.

And then he noticed something else was wrong. The walls of the room were green. Was he dreaming? Hadn't he painted them tan, himself? He walked to the wall and touched it. No, it wasn't fresh paint; it was dry and slightly dusty. He turned to Laddo.

"What color are the walls?" he blurted out.

"You painted them green when you started working here. They haven't changed color overnight, have they?"

Tom could not reply. He went to his locker and got out his work clothes. His overalls looked natural, thank goodness. No, even they were different. Where they had been torn yesterday was now whole. This couldn't be a dream. Was he sick or—something worse?

Laddo eyed him suspiciously. Well, let him look. No matter how strange things seemed, he'd not show his surprise. He'd ask no more questions, and he'd take whatever Laddo handed him. There would be but a few more days of this, with his battery finished.

Tom found a new sketch on his bench. It was of some sort of electrical device, he couldn't tell just what, but the drawing was complete. All he had to do was to follow directions. He selected the proper tools, got the material he needed, and started to work.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Laddo giving the machine a thorough check. He seemed to be going over it inch by inch, wire by wire. Now he was checking the battery. Something wrong! Laddo removed a cell and carried it into his private laboratory, where he locked himself in. Tom busied himself with his work and the time passed quickly.

It was almost noon when Laddo unlocked the door and came toward him. From the expression on Laddo's face, Tom prepared himself for another upbraiding.

"Garmot, what do you know about these batteries?"

"Your battery? I mean, the one in your machine?"

"Certainly. Oh, I forgot. You are the battery expert. Then perhaps you can tell me why, yesterday, each cell had a voltage of 3.65, and this morning it is down to 2.10, although they are fully charged. I tore up one cell and what do you suppose I find?"

"I don't know, Doctor."

"Instead of that valuable isotopic lead we had so much trouble getting, these plates are made of ordinary battery lead. And instead of a solution of sulfuric acid in heavy water, the electrolyte is now a solution in ordinary distilled water."

Tom Garmot was silent. This was all news to him. He had assembled the batteries himself, and they were made, he knew, from ordinary commercial materials.

Laddo went on. "That is not all that is wrong. There is evidence of

sabotage. You have been here over eleven months. I had confidence in your integrity, although I do not credit you with great ability. Now I am tempted to accuse you of deliberately removing the battery and tampering with the entire machine."

Tom heard, but hardly realized just what Laddo was saying. He was fascinated by Laddo's mustache. Undoubtedly it was real. He could see the separate hairs, each firmly planted in the upper lip.

"So far as I can tell, no other real harm has been done. The fact that you, or someone else, have changed wires and other parts makes little difference. They will answer the purpose. The matter of the plating, I admit, is puzzling. I was particular to have chromium plating, as it is more durable than nickel, although"—and here he took some papers from his pocket and glanced through them—"the watchman's report, taken within a week, was positive that the plating was nickel."

Tom saw the papers in Laddo's hand. On the back, fastened with a paper clip, was something cut from a newspaper. The headlines were so clear he could read it readily.

Watchman Prophesies Election Result

FDR to win all but Maine and Vermont

Strange flier frightens Taggert employee

This was about all that Tom could stand. "What is this you are reading?" he asked.

"This is that watchman's report to the superintendent. A couple of years ago he saw a machine similar to the one we are building—but I've mentioned this to you before. Don't stand there with your mouth open. Get busy and locate those missing plates. And tell me where I am to get five gallons of heavy water, with my appropriation almost used up."

Tom had read about isotopic lead, and ventured a suggestion.

"Isn't it possible for the lead you mentioned to turn into the ordinary kind, by itself?"

"Don't display your ignorance. If you know where the lead is, go get it."

Too much was enough, thought Tom. He looked Laddo in the eye.

"Now, get this straight," he said. "I didn't steal your lead, and I don't know where it is—if you ever had any. But if you want a better battery than the one you have, I'll lend you mine. You can call me a 'battery expert' if you want to, but I really do have a battery—and it'll beat yours a mile. I'll bring it down Monday, and you can quit worrying about your isotopes."

Something of respect showed on Laddo's face. "If you've got something good, bring it up," he said. "But," his voice changed, "if this is some kind of trick to gain time or something, forget it. I'll not only accept your resignation, but I'll recover the cost of my battery from you so quick it will make your head swim. Any jury in the world will give me damages when only two of us have the keys to this place."

Tom turned without replying and took off his overalls. Sue him, would he? Take all his money. Any jury in the world. By George, with so much of this funny stuff happening, Laddo might be right. And he'd get his new battery invention, too. He'd have to think this over. He turned to Laddo, who was watching him.

"Don't worry. I'll bring my battery here at nine A.M. Monday." Laddo nodded assent and left him.

Tom changed into his street clothes and went into the hall. Then he thought of something. He returned to the laboratory door and called to Laddo.

"How strong a battery do you need?"

"About a thousand K.W.H. to the pound."

Still dazed by the events of the morning, Tom turned and left.

On his way home it gradually came over him that he was behind the eight ball. A thousand K.W.H. to the pound! That was five times as powerful as he could supply. Well, he had the rest of the day to think it out in peace.

Charlie was waiting for him, and over their lunch Garmot told him everything. "No one but Laddo would dream of a battery like that," he said. "It will be hundreds of years before batteries that powerful are invented."

"Well," said Charlie, "why don't you get him one?"

"Where?"

"Just take another trip in his machine tonight. Go as far as you can into the future, buy a battery, and bring it back with you."

Tom studied the suggestion. Here was one way out. "It might be done, at that," he finally said.

This, of course, brought on more talk. The discussion continued on into the afternoon. After the morning's unusual happenings, which he vaguely associated with the preceding night's adventure, Tom had been more or less afraid of the machine, but their talk crystallized some of his ideas. He boiled them down to this: "The long and short of it is that we aren't where we started. Yesterday, if you'd looked through files of old newspapers, you never would have found a story about that watchman. Now you can find it, because it once happened. It's like a switch on a railroad track. We were on one branch. We went back in the machine and threw a switch when we talked to the watchman. We came back on another branch."

"Can we get switched off this track in the future?" asked Charlie.

"I can't see how, but it's a chance we'll have to take."

To have as many cells as possible, they hurriedly purchased the necessary materials. All Saturday evening and much of Sunday was spent assembling and charging. Sunday evening came, and the cells were loaded in the back of Tom's coupe. They waited for night. Tom hoped he wouldn't find a new lock on the laboratory door. After the way Laddo had talked, he wouldn't be surprised at anything.

They drew up to the service entrance of the laboratory. Heavily loaded with the new battery, they used the freight elevator to get to the top floor. Tom noticed with relief that the lock seemed unchanged. He tried his key and the door opened.

Just as they entered, a blinding light flashed in their faces.

"What's that?" Charlie blinked.

"Laddo set a trap for us. There's a camera hidden somewhere with our picture in it. If I don't deliver the goods now, my name is mud."

"Then let's go," said Charlie, making for the machine.

They quickly replaced the old cells with the new ones and opened the skylight. Charlie turned out the lights, and they took their seats. With new power, the machine rapidly ascended. Tom stopped it the usual five hundred feet in the air.

"Ready, Charlie?" he asked.

"Gosh, yes."

Tom pushed the time lever forward a little. Nothing happened. He pushed it farther. Still no effect. He yanked it all the way over. They still failed to experience the expected compression. Tom looked down. There was the laboratory, dim in the night, just as they had left it. But

no—he recognized a car stopping in front of the building. It was Laddo's sedan. Dr. Laddo stepped out and crossed the sidewalk.

"What'll we do, Charlie? There's Laddo coming. We can't go into the future—Laddo's right. It takes five times the power we've got! And if we go back down there, he'll catch us red-handed."

"Then for Pete's sake, go into the past."

It seemed the only course open to them, but what good would it do? Garmot's mind raced over possibilities and reached a decision. He eased off the power, and the machine began to descend.

"Now what?" demanded Thorne. "Don't go back to the lab. If you are afraid to go into the past, edge her over close to our coupe, so we can scram."

Rapidly Tom gave instructions. The machine dropped through the open skylight and settled on the floor. Flashlight on, Tom ran to the bookcase, selected the volume he wanted, and slipped it into his pocket. Charlie had gone to the nearest workbench and seized a radio tube. Almost as soon as they had come, they had gone up again. Just as Tom pushed the time lever back, Charlie, looking down, saw the laboratory lights flash on and Laddo enter the room.

Fighting the compression, Tom watched the time meter. No longer was he going as far as he could; he had a definite goal in view. As that goal neared, he moved the lever back toward neutral. The pointers moved slowly. He snapped it back into its notch. In an early dawn they floated over a suburban settlement. Directly below was one of the houses.

Garmot didn't like this. He juggled the lever a trifle. It was night. Not a light showed below. Only the faint light of the stars told him they had come to rest on the stream of Time.

"Point the spotlight straight down," Tom directed.

In the faint light, Tom let the machine settle, maneuvering until it rested on a flat porch roof.

"Where are we?" whispered Charlie.

"If the meter is right, this is July 1851. And you ought to recognize this house. You've seen it in the museum."

"You mean the old Taggert house?"

"Yes, and if he's at home, Thad Taggert is asleep in the back room, right now. This front room is his office. I hope the window isn't locked."

They had gotten out, and the tin roof crackled slightly beneath

their feet. Charlie reached the window first. "No screen, anyway," he whispered.

"Not in 1851," replied Tom. He tried the sash. It slid up easily. Charlie held it while Garmot entered the room and found a window stick to hold it in place. Charlie followed.

Against the opposite wall was the famous Taggert desk. They recognized it. This entire house and all its furnishings would one day be moved bodily into the Taggert Museum. The money old Thad Taggert had earned would support the Taggert Foundation, Dr. Laddo —and build a Time machine.

Tom flashed his light over the desk top. Thaddeus Taggert had been there recently. An unfinished letter lay before them, pen and ink beside it. Tom started when he saw almost an entire sheet of postage stamps, the five-cent 1847 issue. What a find for a stamp collector! And there were almost as many of the ten-cent ones beneath, both weighted down with a pair of steel shears.

"These stamps will do—we couldn't hope to find anything better. You take charge of them while I write the note." He tore a page from his notebook and wrote:

> DEAR MR. TAGGERT:
>
> Travelers from the future leave for you a copy of the 1937 edition of the Electrical Handbook. We also leave a radio tube which is described in the book. We are taking your postage stamps as part payment. If you would help us, work like the devil on better storage batteries.

Carefully closing the window behind them, they got back in the machine. With a faint hum it rose into the night. Tom pushed the lever forward. The stars vanished. They were on their way—back to 1938.

When the machine stopped, the myriad lights of a great city shone beneath them in all directions. A huge factory building towered toward them. Tom let the machine settle on its roof.

"I suppose you call this 1938 again," ventured Charlie, looking at the city around him.

"Yes, and about ten-fifteen P.M. Our watches ought to be all right again."

"You don't think we can get a single minute ahead of our watches, huh?"

"That's the idea. See that clock tower." Some blocks away a great illuminated dial indicated 10:15. "Now to get down off this roof."

They walked to the parapet and looked over. There was a sheer drop of perhaps twenty stories. Charlie looked around for a penthouse. There were only a few closed scuttles.

"We'll get into trouble if we try walking down through the building," said Charlie. "It isn't familiar to us, and may be full of people. Why don't you drop the machine down into some shrubbery and hide it?"

"No," said Tom, "we couldn't find a better hiding place than right here. It's a warm night. We'll take turns sleeping, and early tomorrow, before daylight, you run me to the ground and then come back up here where you'll not be seen."

They were not sleepy, and spent most of the night whispering and wondering how things would turn out tomorrow. The story beneath them was occupied, judging from occasional sounds. It was well they had not tried to go down through the building. Eventually Charlie dropped off to sleep until awakened by Garmot.

"We'd better go now. It's beginning to get light."

They got into the machine, Charlie at the controls. He rose jerkily into the air and uncertainly descended to a fairly secluded place on the lawn.

"You know my plans—what few I have. I'll be back as soon as I can. Maybe in three hours, maybe not until later. Watch for my signal." Garmot held out his hand and Thorne clasped it tightly.

"Sure, Tom. I'll be watching." Charlie waved and began to rise. Tom watched him until he got the signal indicating a safe landing. Then he started walking toward the tall buildings several miles away.

Tom never forgot that journey. He felt like a country boy in New York. Later, when he recounted it to Charlie, he told him how he had tried out one of his coins on a newsboy and had been properly bawled out for attempting to pass fake money. How the buildings all seemed to be made chiefly of plastics; of the queer little one- and two-passenger fliers which, though not in common use, were occasionally seen dropping into parking spaces alongside automobiles. Of strangely silent autos, somehow suggestive of the old-fashioned electrics, but which raced along faster than anything Tom had ever seen before. He told Charlie of the odd words he overheard on the streets—idioms whose

meanings he could not guess; of the yellow sodium lights that were used as much as the familiar neons.

It was day when he reached the business district. He neared a sign reading "City Recreation Hall No. 7." People were entering and leaving. No one seemed to be taking tickets. In spite of his slightly odd clothing—which, by the way, no one had seemed to notice—he took a chance and entered. After all, they could do nothing worse than ask him to leave.

But Tom wasn't stopped. The place was like a huge hotel lobby. There were comfortable seats, a restaurant, a barber shop, and all the rest. A number of people were seated before a television screen, watching and listening to a news commentator. Tom wanted to watch it too, but he had other things to do.

In the advertisements of a discarded newspaper he found what he wanted. Classified under "Birdie Wijits" he found "Power Boxes" advertised. Each dealer, true to form, had the best product obtainable. He copied some addresses in his memo book. The prices, he noted, ran into money. For an ordinary "birdie"—evidently one of the little fliers—a power box cost around $100. He might need as many as ten of them.

Next, to get the money. Tom hoped there were stamp collectors in these strange times. He consulted a city directory. This place was called Taggert City, he noticed. Yes, under "Postage, Antique," he found the names of stamp dealers. One address he recognized—333 Taggert Avenue. That was the street on which he had walked downtown. No. 333 should be close. The name was "Nicodemus, the Stampman. Buyer and Seller of Antique Postage." It was a little after eight. Nicodemus might be in his shop now.

No. 333 was an office building, and the directory listed Nicodemus on the ninth floor. Tom rode up in an elevator and went to the dealer's room. The shop impressed him favorably. A gentleman was hanging up his coat and hat. Mr. Nicodemus had evidently just arrived.

"How much are you paying for the five-cent, U.S. 1847 issue—mint?" Tom asked him.

"Mint?" Nicodemus didn't quite understand.

"Not used, with gum on the back."

"Oh, you mean 'pristine,'" said Nicodemus. "So you have one, eh? What did it cost you?"

"Nothing. An heirloom."

"I hope it is not a counterfeit. A genuine copy is quite scarce. I could give you, say, fifty dollars."

Tom shook his head. Stamp dealers were probably the same here as everywhere.

"How much did you expect?" Nicodemus asked, watching him closely.

Tom had no idea what they were worth here, although he well knew he could not get even fifty for a single, back where he came from. But he was expected to answer.

"I ought to get at least half of the selling price."

"Yes," Nicodemus admitted, "and for a genuine copy with wide margins, I'll pay you that." He consulted a price list, turning it around so Tom could see. There it was, picture and all, and the price was $200.

"You'll pay me one hundred dollars?"

"For a good copy, yes."

"And a block of four?"

"For a block of four, I'll give you a thousand."

Garmot agreed to return soon with the block, and left. Alone, he carefully cut it from the sheet. After a decent interval he returned. The dealer's eyes gleamed. He had not thought such a specimen existed. He examined it carefully under a lens, and then by ultraviolet light.

"It's genuine," he announced. "I suppose you want cash."

Tom nodded. Nicodemus went to the next room and returned with a handful of bank notes. Tom examined them curiously. They were odd, but seemed to be all right. Thanking Nicodemus, he left.

After referring to his memos, he was directed to the nearest "wijit" shop. He found it much like the familiar auto supply store, full of gadgets. That was it! He smiled. "Wijits" meant "gadgets," without a doubt. An intelligent young man who knew all about power boxes waited on him. For $800 he purchased fifty pounds of concentrated electricity—an eight-unit power box containing over a thousand kilowatt-hours of energy, far in excess of Laddo's requirements. With them he bought a power box handbook, describing charging, maintenance, and repairs.

"Where shall I deliver it?" the clerk asked.

Tom had been dreading the long tramp back out to the factory, lugging a heavy package. He said, "I'm to meet a friend at Taggert

Avenue and Madison Street, but you can't just leave them on the sidewalk. Could I go along with them?"

"Certainly, if you don't mind riding in our delivery birdie."

This was all right with Tom, and the clerk led him to a rear court where the flier was parked. Its driver moved over to make room for him, and, with a push on the accelerator, they rose, much as did Laddo's machine, and flew rapidly out Taggert Avenue.

"I'm glad I'm not driving a ground car any more," remarked the driver. "These birdies are the volts. Ten years from now, and the air will be full of them."

Tom agreed. He would like to hear more, but the birdie was about to settle down. Selecting a parking space, the driver landed gently by the curb. Tom took his power box and got out. The driver waved him good-by and was off.

Across the street was the factory building. The sidewalks were alive with people. Tom could see no sign of Charlie on the roof. Well, it wasn't yet nine o'clock. He'd just have to wait until Charlie happened to look down.

Tom was hungry, and when he saw the restaurant on the corner, he went in. He ordered sandwiches and coffee for himself and Charlie. The waiter brought Charlie's coffee in a container made of white, celluloidlike material, and his sandwiches came covered with a transparent wrapping that must have been sprayed on. The food tasted good.

Refreshed, Tom crossed the street and stopped on the sidewalk near his rendezvous. He looked up. Was that Charlie's head leaning over the parapet? He pointed his flashlight up and spelled out, "O.K. Land in the bushes on my right."

Back came the answer: "Coming."

The lawn was perfectly kept, and Tom stayed off it. They might arrest him for walking on the grass. A few uniformed men were in evidence. He stood on the sidewalk, hoping his upward gaze would not attract unfavorable attention.

Down dropped the machine, so fast that Tom thought it was surely out of control. But Charlie slowed up at the last minute and landed with a jolt right in the middle of a beautiful bed of flowers. Lugging the power box, Tom raced across the lawn toward him. Someone yelled. A whistle blew. He saw two men running toward him. He reached the machine, and up they went.

"Lord, Tom, I'm glad you're back. I see you got your battery."

"Yes, I got it. Say, how much power have you got?" for the machine was now climbing very slowly.

"Not much, I'm afraid. Gosh, I hope we can at least make the roof." Charlie looked anxiously at the building beside which they were barely rising. Both breathed a sigh of relief as the machine topped the parapet and slipped gently across. It landed with a thump as Tom reached over and cut off the power. He jumped from the machine and looked over the parapet.

"We'll have to work fast. There's a big commotion down there. The police will be up here in a minute."

"I shouldn't have practiced after you left—used up too much power. What do you want me to do? Change batteries?"

"Yes. Don't bother to take out the old one. Here. Unscrew that nut and connect this cable. I'll look after the other. Hurry."

They heard a shout. One of the hatches was open, and a uniformed policeman was rising out of it. Tom saw him and reached for the instrument board. As the policeman came toward them, everything went black. Tom had thrown the Time lever all the way over, to drain the last remaining erg of energy from the exhausted battery. The pointer crept slowly around, gradually coming to a stop. Tom snapped off the feeble current.

"Where are we now?" asked Charlie.

"Yesterday afternoon."

The sun was low in the west. Charlie eyed the hatchway doubtfully, but it was tightly closed.

Working carefully now, they installed the power box. The machine was ready for action again.

"Did you get your sandwiches, Charlie?" Tom asked.

"What sandwiches?"

Tom looked all about and laughed. "I guess they'll be on the lawn there tomorrow morning. Guess they were left out in the rush. Probably the police will eat them. You'll have to wait for your breakfast."

With a last look at the city around them, Tom elevated the machine, pulled back the lever, and they were off. Carefully watching the dials, Tom stopped the machine again in 1851. It was daylight. He ran back a few hours. Night. They descended to the porch roof, this time landing nearer the end.

"Now we must recover the book and all, and return these stamps," said Tom.

"Yes, I know that's your plan," said Charlie. "Seems a pity, though. Think what a good time Taggert might have with them. And you surely aren't going to give these stamps back. Just think how they would look in your collection."

"We've got to, to get back home. We must arrange things here so the future will go on practically unchanged. I'd like to keep the stamps, but we can't risk it. He may not miss the four I sold, but he's bound to miss two sheets."

They walked softly to the window. By Tom's light they could see the desk, but there was no book lying on it—only the half-written letter. "We're early," said Tom. Then, as realization came to him, he muttered, "Well I'll be—"

Charlie looked at him inquiringly.

Garmot went on. "If we wait here we'll see *ourselves* land and leave the book."

"And I can go up and speak to myself?"

"Not if I know it, you can't. If you do, the whole future may be changed. You'll hide with me over there, behind the bay window, and we'll carry the machine there, too. It's not too heavy for both of us."

This was quickly done. They waited in the shadows. Whispering, Charlie asked to see the stamps. "I'm not a collector, but I would like to have a look at them if they're worth a hundred dollars apiece." Tom handed them to him. Under the protection of his coat, by flashlight, Charlie had his look. Tom stood peering into the sky, all attention.

There was a faint whine overhead. "Lights out, Charlie. Here they come," Garmot whispered.

Down came a machine. Out of it stepped a man and a boy of eighteen. From the shadows, Garmot and Charlie watched, scarcely breathing. The two visitors raised the window and entered.

Charlie chuckled. He turned to Tom. "Do you think we were here watching when we came the first time?"

"I don't know. Maybe we were."

Before Tom could stop him, Charlie tiptoed forward and peered into the window. He returned.

"It's us, all right. You're writing the note. They'll be out now."

And out they came. Tom noticed that they left the window stick

outside. Well, he could correct that. The two men got into their machine and rose swiftly. Suddenly the sound of their motor stopped. They had gone into the future.

Tom breathed a sigh of relief. "Come," he said to Charlie, "let's do this right. Give me the stamps."

Carefully he raised the window. Charlie held it for him while he stepped through. After putting the window stick in its place, he crossed the room and secured the handbook, the radio tube, and the note. He carefully replaced the stamps as near their original position as he could remember. Then he came out. After silently closing the sash, the two pushed the machine out to clear the eaves and got aboard.

Garmot let the machine stop itself. The sudden burst of sunshine almost blinded them. Below lay the familiar laboratory, its skylight open.

Tom looked down. "There's our friend Laddo waiting for us. Won't he have a fit in about two minutes?" He guided the machine toward the opening. Gently they settled to the floor.

Laddo strode rapidly toward them. "Well, here you are at last, Garmot. What have you got to say?"

"I've got some batteries for you that will knock your eye out," said Garmot.

After his first few words, Laddo demanded a full and orderly explanation. For perhaps an hour he listened to Tom's story, with occasional comments from Charlie. When it was finished he began questioning.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Charlie ventured. "I haven't had my breakfast. You fellows just go on. I'll run out and get something to eat." Garmot nodded assent and Charlie left. When he returned an hour later he found the two still talking.

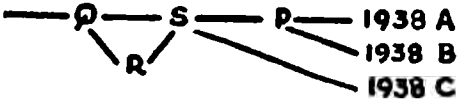
"You're right, Garmot, in your track theory," Laddo was saying. "If you tamper with the past you cannot expect to find the present unchanged. As you say, time seems to be like a railway track on which we travel. When, in my machine, you go back into the past and do the least thing, you change the whole future from then on; and when you then go into that future, you find it different. Let's see, now. What tracks have you been on?

"You started from 1938A. That was when you first came here to try out your battery for elevating the machine. You inadvertently—how

about that, young man?—went back to point P in 1936 and talked to the watchman. He has, by the way, died since then. This threw a switch and you returned to 1938B. All that is clear enough."

"That's just the way Tom explained it to me," Charlie put in.

"And to me, too. I am merely clarifying it in my own mind. Now, to proceed, last night you got into the machine and went back to Q, in 1851. Leaving that handbook threw another switch, and you went forward to 1938C, where you bought the power box a few hours ago. You then returned to Q and hid there until you removed the book at point R. This threw another switch and put you back on the B track at point S. You returned to 1938B, and that's where you are now.



"I want to congratulate you, Garmot, on your cleverness in making over a future to meet your requirements. But I have a question that needs clearing up. This is embarrassing, but I gather from some of your remarks that you feared I would sue you and take your invention from you. You hint that you have considered me a hard and soulless fellow. Am I right?"

Tom's face reddened. He certainly did not want to reopen a sore spot that seemed to be healing. But Charlie had no such inhibitions.

"You're right, Dr. Laddo. And I don't blame him. He told me how you talked to him—what you said when you accused him of stealing that isotopic lead."

"What were the exact words I used?"

"You told him any jury on earth would give you damages when only you two had the keys to the laboratory."

Laddo was silent for a long time. Garmot wondered if there would be another outburst.

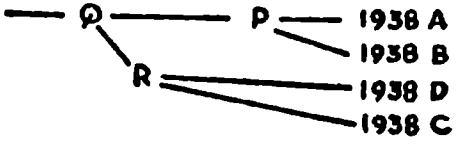
"I was wrong," he said finally. "You are on still another track."

"What's that?" said Tom.

"I mean you are in 1938D.

"When you went back to Taggert's house the second time, you failed to leave *everything* just as it had been before your first visit. You failed to return all of his stamps, for you sold some of them, remember? Taggert missed those stamps and accused one of his associates

of stealing them. Later, he found that this person could not possibly have been there at the time. This made a deep impression on him, and years later he wrote a short article about it. Yonder is a copy, framed." Laddo pointed to the laboratory wall. "That little sermon deeply affected me, too. I admire old Thaddeus Taggert's character and have always tried to follow his precepts. So you see, at R, by recovering the book but not returning all of the stamps, you threw another switch, and you are now in 1938D. I hope you like it here—for I see no way for you to go back and undo everything."



"I don't want to," said Tom. "This suits me better."

All of their questions were not answered. Laddo was stumped when Charlie asked him what would have happened had he and Tom encountered themselves on that second visit to the porch roof.

"That's a thing one would have to experiment with to find the answer," he said.

When Dr. Laddo and his machine disappeared several months later, Tom and Charlie didn't worry much. They knew he had gone wandering into the past. Garmot hoped he had found a world to his liking, on another track—and rather suspected he might have gone to leave a book on functional equations on some Newton's desk.

IF WE assume that time travel from yesterday to today is possible, then there are really only two logical ways to arrange the transportation. It seems to me that the most "likely" method would be for an inventor in our age to send a time machine back to kidnap someone from the past. Strangely enough, this method has not, as far as I can verify, been immortalized in any story worth anthologizing. . . . The other way, which posits the existence of "natural" time warps or traps into which people from the past can fall, is the one that is used in the two stories in this section.

It is interesting to note, incidentally, that in neither story is there any actual mention of method, much less any discussion. The curious happening just happens—which is, of course, just the way it would happen if it ever did!

Day Keene

"WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAIL . . ."

Rarely in the records of science fiction has there been so delightful a game played with the serious business of history as in this tale of a soldier of the American Revolution let loose in New York City of 1950. It is interesting, too, how much the story gains in credibility through the author's knowledge of the minutiae of life both in the Revolutionary period and, today, in the humdrum doings of a stenographer living on New York's Upper West Side. Usually science-fiction writers do not have to face the problem of authentic backgrounds, since most of them create their own out of whole cloth.

EPHRAIM HALE yawned a great yawn and awakened. He'd expected to have a head. Surprisingly, considering the amount of hot buttered rum he'd consumed the night before, he had none. But where in the name of the Continental Congress had he gotten to this time? The last he remembered was parting from Mr. Henry in front of the Pig and Whistle. A brilliant statesman, Mr. Henry.

"Give me liberty, or give me death."

E-yah. But that didn't tell him where he was. It looked like a cave. This sort of thing had to stop. Now he was out of the Army and in politics, he had to be more circumspect. Ephraim felt for his purse, felt flesh, and every inch of his six-feet-two blushed crimson. This, Martha would never believe.

He sat up on the floor of the cave. The thief who had taken his clothes had also stolen his purse. He was naked and penniless. And he the representative from Middlesex to the first Congress to convene in New York City in this year of our Lord 1789.

He searched the floor of the cave. All the thief had left, along with his home-cobbled brogans, his Spanish pistol, and the remnants of an old leather jerkin, was the post from Sam Osgood thanking him for his support in helping to secure Osgood's appointment as Postmaster General.

Forming a loin cloth of the leather, Ephraim tucked the pistol and cover in it. The letter could prove valuable. A man in politics never

knew when a friend might need reminding. Then, decent as possible under the circumstances, he walked toward the distant point of light to reconnoiter his position. It was bad. His rum-winged feet had guided him into a gentleman's park. And the gentleman was prolific. A dozen boys of assorted ages were playing at ball on the greensward.

Rolling aside the rock that formed a natural door to the cave, Ephraim beckoned the nearest boy, a cherub of about seven. "I wonder, young master, if you would tell me on whose estate I am trespassing."

The boy grinned through a maze of freckles. "Holy smoke, mister. What you out front for? A second Nature Boy, or Tarzan Comes to Television?"

"I beg your pardon?" Ephraim said, puzzled.

"Ya heard me," the boy said.

Close up, he didn't look so cherubic. He was one of the modern generation with no respect for his elders. What he needed was a beech switch well applied to the seat of his britches. Ephraim summoned the dignity possible to a man without pants. "I am the Honorable Ephraim Hale, late officer of the Army of the United States, and elected representative from Middlesex to Congress. And I will be beholden to you, young sir, if you will inform your paternal parent a gentleman is in distress and wouldst have words with him."

"Aw, ya fadder's mustache," the boy said. "Take it to the V.A. I should lose the old man a day of hackin'." So saying, he returned to cover second base.

Ephraim was tempted to pursue and cane him. He might have if it hadn't been for the girl. While he had been talking to the boy, she had strolled across the greensward to a sunny knoll not far from the mouth of the cave. She was both young and comely. As he watched, fascinated, she began to disrobe. The top part of her dress came off, revealing a bandeau of like material barely covering her firm young breasts. Then, stepping out of her skirt, she stood a moment in bandeau and short flared pants, her arms stretched in obeisance to the sun before reclining on the grass.

Ephraim blushed furiously. He hadn't seen as much of Martha during their ten years of marriage. He cleared his throat to make his presence known and permit her to cover her charms.

The girl turned her head toward him. "Hello. You taking a sun bath, too? It's nice to have it warm so oily, ain't it?"

Ephraim continued to blush. The girl continued to look, and liked

what she saw. With a pair of pants and a whisky glass, the big man in the mouth of the cave could pass as a man of distinction. If his hair was long, his forehead was high and his cheeks were gaunt and clean-shaven. His shoulders were broad and well muscled, and his torso tapered to a V. It wasn't every day a girl met so handsome a man. She smiled. "My name's Gertie Swartz. What's yours?"

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Ephraim told her.

"That's a nice name," she approved. "I knew a family named Hale in Greenpernt. But they moved up to Riverside Height. Ya live in the Heights?"

Ephraim tried to keep from looking at her legs. "No. I reside on a farm, a league or so from Perth Amboy."

"Oh. Over in Joisey, huh?" Gertie was mildly curious. "Then what ya doin' in New York in that Johnny Weismuller outfit?"

Ephraim sighed. "I was robbed."

The girl sat up, clucking sympathetically. "Imagine. Right in Central Park. Like I was saying to Sadie just the other night, there ought to be a law. A mugger cleaned you, huh?"

A bit puzzled by her reference to a *Crocodilus palustris,* but emboldened by her friendliness, Ephraim came out of the cave and sat on the paper beside her. Her patois was strange but not unpleasant. Swartz was a German name. The blonde girl was probably the offspring of some Hessian. Even so, she was a pretty little doxy and he hadn't bussed a wench for some time. He slipped an experimental arm around her waist. "Haven't we met before?"

Gertie removed his arm and slapped him without heat. "No. And no hard feelings, understand. Ya can't blame a guy for trying." She saw the puckered white scars on his chest, souvenirs of King's Mountain. "Ya was in the Army, huh?"

"Five years."

She was amazed and pleased. "Now, ain't that a coincidence? Ya probably know my brother Benny. He was in five years, too." Gertie was concerned. "You were drinking last night, huh?"

"To my shame."

Gertie made the soft clucking sound again. "How ya going to get home in that outfit?"

"That," Ephraim said, "is the problem."

She reached for and put on her skirt. "Look. I live just over on Eighty-second. And if ya want, on account of you both being veterans,

I'll lend you one of Benny's suits." She wriggled into the top part of her four-piece sun ensemble. "Benny's about the same size as you. Wait."

Smiling, Ephraim watched her go across the greensward to a broad turnpike bisecting the estate, then rose in sudden horror as a metallic-looking monster with sightless round glass eyes swooped out from behind a screen of bushes and attempted to run her down. The girl dodged it adroitly, paused in the middle of the pike to allow a stream of billingsgate to escape her sweet red lips, then continued blithely on her way.

His senses alerted, Ephraim continued to watch the pike. The monsters were numerous as locusts and seemed to come in assorted colors and sizes. Then he spotted a human in each and realized what they must be. While he had lain in a drunken stupor, Mother Shipton's prophecy had come true— *"Carriages without horses shall go."*

He felt sick. The malcontents would undoubtedly try to blame *this* on the administration. He had missed the turning of an important page of history. He lifted his eyes above the budding trees and was almost sorry he had. The trees alone were familiar. A solid rectangle of buildings hemmed in what he had believed to be an estate; unbelievable buildings. Back of them, still taller buildings lifted their spires and Gothic towers and one stubby thumb into the clouds. His pulse quickening, he looked at the date line of a paper on the grass. It was April 15, 1950.

He would never clank cups with Mr. Henry again. The fiery Virginian, along with his cousin Nathan and a host of other good and true men, had long since become legends. He should be dust. It hadn't been a night since he had parted from Mr. Henry. It had been one hundred and sixty-one years.

A wave of sadness swept him. The warm wind off the river seemed cooler. The sun lost some of its warmth. He had never felt so alone. Then he forced himself to face it. How many times had he exclaimed: *"If only I could come back one hundred years from now."*

Well, here he was, with sixty-one years for good measure.

A white object bounded across the grass toward him. Instinctively, Ephraim caught it and found it was the hard white sphere being used by the boys playing at ball.

"All the way," one of them yelled.

Ephraim cocked his arm and threw. The sphere sped like a rifle

ball toward the target of the most distant glove, some seventeen rods away.

"Wow!" said the youth. The young voice was so shocked with awe that Ephraim had an uneasy feeling the boy was about to genuflect. "Gee. Get a load of that whip. The guy's got an arm like Joe DiMaggio. . . ."

Supper was good but over before Ephraim had barely got started. Either the American stomach had shrunk, or Gertie and her brother, despite their seeming affluence, were among the very poor. There had only been two vegetables, one meat, no fowl or venison, no hoecakes, no mead or small ale or rum, and only one pie and one cake for the three of them.

He sat, still hungry, in the parlor thinking of Martha's ample board and generous bed, realizing she, too, must be dust. There was no use in returning to Middlesex. It would be as strange and terrifying as New York.

Benny offered him a small paper spill of tobacco. "Sis tells me ya was in the Army. What outfit was ya with?" Before Ephraim could tell him, he continued, "Me, I was one of the Bastards of Bastogne." He dug a thumb into Ephraim's ribs. "Pretty hot, huh, what Tony McAuliffe tells the Krauts when they think they got us where the hair is short and want we should surrender."

"What did he tell them?" Ephraim asked politely.

Benny looked at him suspiciously.

" 'Nuts!' he tol' 'em. 'Nuts.' Ya sure ya was in the Army, chum?"

Ephraim said he was certain.

"E.T.O. or Pacific?"

"Around here," Ephraim said. "You know—Germantown, Monmouth, King's Mountain."

"Oh. Stateside, huh?" Benny promptly lost all interest in his sister's guest. Putting his hat on the back of his head, he announced his bloody intention of going down to the corner and shooting one of the smaller Kelly Pools.

"Have a good time," Gertie told him.

Sitting down beside Ephraim, she fiddled with the knobs on an ornate commode, and a diminutive mule skinner appeared out of nowhere cracking a bull whip and shouting something almost unintelligible about having a Bible in his pack for the Reverend Mr. Black.

Ephraim shied away from the commode, wide-eyed.

Gertie fiddled with the knobs again and the little man went away. "Ya don't like television, huh?" She moved a little closer to him. "Ya want we should just sit and talk?"

Patting at the perspiration on his forehead with one of Benny's handkerchiefs, Ephraim said, "That would be fine."

As with the horseless carriages, the towering buildings, and the water that ran out of taps hot or cold as you desired, there was some logical explanation for the little man. But he had swallowed all the wonders he was capable of assimilating in one night.

Gertie moved still closer. "Wadda ya wanna talk about?"

Ephraim considered the question. He wanted to know if the boys had ever been able to fund or reduce the national debt. Seventy-four million, five hundred and fifty-five thousand, six hundred and forty-one dollars was a lot of money. He wanted to know if Mr. Henry had been successful in his advocation of the ten amendments to the Constitution, hereinafter to be known as the Bill of Rights, and how many states had ratified them. He wanted to know the tax situation and how the public had reacted to the proposed imposition of a twenty-five-cent-a-gallon excise tax on whisky.

"What," he asked Gertie, "would you say was the most important thing that happened this past year?"

Gertie considered the question. "Well, Rita Hayworth had a baby and Clark Gable got married."

"I mean politically."

"Oh. Mayor O'Dwyer got married."

Gertie had been very kind. Gertie was very lovely. Ephraim meant to see more of her. With Martha fluttering around in heaven exchanging receipts for chowchow and watermelon preserves, there was no reason why he shouldn't. But as with modern wonders, he'd had all of Gertie he could take for one night. He wanted to get out into the city and find out just what had happened during the past one hundred and sixty-one years.

Gertie was sorry to see him go. "But ya will be back, won't you, Ephraim?"

He sealed the promise with a kiss. "Tomorrow night. And a good many nights after that." He made hay on what he had seen the sun shine. "You're very lovely, my dear."

She slipped a bill into the pocket of his coat. "For the ferry fare back

to Joisey." There were lighted candles in her eyes. "Until tomorrow night, Ephraim."

The streets were even more terrifying than they had been in the daytime. Ephraim walked east on Eighty-second Street, south on Central Park West, then east on Central Park South. He'd had it in mind to locate the Pig and Whistle. Realizing the futility of such an attempt, he stopped in at the next place he came to exuding a familiar aroma, and, laying the dollar Gertie had slipped into his pocket on the bar, he ordered rum.

The first thing he had to do was find gainful employment. As a Harvard graduate, lawyer, and former congressman, it shouldn't prove too difficult. He might, in time, even run for office again. A congressman's six dollars per diem wasn't to be held lightly.

A friendly, white-jacketed Mine Host set his drink in front of him and picked up the bill. "I thank you, sir."

About to engage him in conversation concerning the state of the nation, Ephraim looked from Mine Host to the drink, then back at Mine Host again. "E-yah. I should think you would thank me. I'll have my change, if you please. Also a man-sized drink."

No longer so friendly, Mine Host leaned across the wood. "That's an ounce and a half. What change? Where did you come from, Reuben? What did you expect to pay?"

"The usual price. A few pennies a mug," Ephraim said. "The war is over. Remember? And with the best imported island rum selling wholesale at twenty cents a gallon—"

Mine Host picked up the shot glass and returned the bill to the bar. "You win. You've had enough, pal. What do you want to do, cost me my license? Go ahead. Like a good fellow. Scram."

He emphasized the advice by putting the palm of his hand in Ephraim's face, pushing him toward the door. It was a mistake. Reaching across the bar, Ephraim snaked Mine Host out from behind it and was starting to shake some civility into the publican when he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Let's let it go at that, chum."

"Drunk and disorderly, eh?" a second voice added.

The newcomers were big men, men who carried themselves with the unmistakable air of authority. He attempted to explain, and one of

them held his arms while the other man searched him and found the Spanish pistol.

"Oh. Carrying a heater, eh? That happens to be against the law, chum."

"Ha," Ephraim laughed at him. "Also ho." He quoted from memory Article II of the amendments Mr. Henry had read him in the Pig and Whistle:

" 'A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.' "

"Now he's a militia," the plainclothes man said.

"He's a nut," his partner added.

"Get him out of here," Mine Host said.

Ephraim sat on the bunk in his cell, deflated. This was a fine resurrection for a member of the First Congress.

"Cheer up," a voice from the upper bunk consoled. "The worst they can do is burn you." He offered Ephraim a paper spill of tobacco. "The name is Silovitz."

Ephraim asked him why he was in gaol.

"Alimony," the other man sighed. "That is, the nonpayment thereof."

The word was new to Ephraim. He asked Silovitz to explain. "But that's illegal, archaic. You can't be jailed for debt."

His cell mate lighted a cigarette. "No. Of course not. Right now I'm sitting in the Stork Club buying Linda Darnell a drink." He studied Ephraim's face. "Say, I've been wondering who you look like. I make you now. You look like the statue of Nathan Hale the D.A.R. erected in Central Park."

"It's a family resemblance," Ephraim said. "Nat was a second cousin. They hanged him in '76, the same year I went into the Army."

Silovitz nodded approval. "That's a good yarn. Stick to it. The wife of the judge you'll probably draw is an ardent D.A.R. But if I were you I'd move my war record up a bit and remove a few more cousins between myself and Nathan."

He smoked in silence a minute. "Boy. It must have been nice to live back in those days. A good meal for a dime. Whisky five cents a drink. No sales or income or surtax. No corporate or excise profits tax. No unions, no John L., no check-off. No tax on diapers and coffins. No

closed shops. No subsidies. No paying farmers for cotton they didn't plant or for the too many potatoes they did. No forty-two billion dollar budget."

"I beg your pardon?" Ephraim said.

"Ya heard me." Swept by a nostalgia for something he'd never known, Silovitz continued. "No two hundred and sixty-five billion national debt. No trying to spend ourselves out of the poorhouse. No hunting or fishing or driving or occupational license. No supporting three-fourths of Europe and Asia. No atom bomb. No Molotov. No Joe Stalin. No alimony. No Frankie Sinatra. No Video. No bebop."

His eyes shone. "No New Dealers, Fair Dealers, Democrats, Jeffersonian Democrats, Republicans, State's Righters, Communists, Socialists, Socialist-Labor, Farmer-Labor, American-Labor, Liberals, Progressives, and Prohibitionists, and W.C.T.U.ers. Congress united and fighting to make this a nation." He quoted the elderly gentleman from Pennsylvania. " 'We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.' Ah. Those were the days."

Ephraim cracked his knuckles. It was a pretty picture, but according to his recollection, not exactly correct. The boys had hung together pretty well during the first few weeks after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But from there on in, it had been a dog fight. No two delegates had been able to agree on even the basic articles of confederation. The Constitution itself was a patchwork affair and compromise drafted originally as a preamble and seven Articles by delegates from twelve of the thirteen states at the May '87 convention in Philadelphia. And as for the boys' hanging together, the first congress had convened on March 4 and it had been April 6 before a quorum had been present.

Silovitz sighed. "Still, it's the little things that get ya. If only Bessie hadn't insisted on listening to 'When a Girl Marries' when I wanted to hear the B-Bar-B Riders. And if only I hadn't made that one bad mistake."

"What was that?" Ephraim asked.

Silovitz told him. "I snuck up to the Catskills to hide out on the court order. And what happens? A game warden picks me up because I forgot to buy a two-dollar fishing license!"

A free man again. Ephraim stood on the walk in front of the Fifty-second Street Station diverting outraged pedestrians into two rushing

streams as he considered his situation. It hadn't been much of a trial. The arresting officers admitted the pistol was foul with rust and probably hadn't been fired since O'Sullivan was a gleam in his great-great-grandfather's eyes.

"Ya name is Hale. An' ya a veteran, uh?" the judge had asked.

"Yes," Ephraim admitted, "I am." He'd followed Silovitz's advice. "What's more, Nathan Hale was a relation of mine."

The judge had beamed. "Ya don' say. Ya a Son of the Revolution, uh?"

On Ephraim admitting he was and agreeing with the judge the ladies of the D.A.R. had the right to stop someone named Marion Anderson from singing in Constitution Hall if they wanted to, the judge, running for re-election, had told him to go and drink no more, or if he had to drink, not to beef about his bill.

"Ya got ya state bonus and ya N.S.L.I. refund, didncha?"

Physically and mentally buffeted by his night in a cell and Silovitz's revelation concerning the state of the nation, Ephraim stood frightened by the present and aghast at the prospect of the future.

Only two features of his resurrection pleased him. Both were connected with Gertie. Women, thank God, hadn't changed. Gertie was very lovely. With Gertie sharing his board and bed he might manage to acclimate himself and be about the business of every good citizen, begetting future toilers to pay off the national debt. It wasn't an unpleasing prospect. He had, after all, been celibate one hundred and sixty-one years. Still, with rum at five dollars a fifth, eggs eighty cents a dozen, and lamb chops ninety-five cents a pound, marriage would run into money. He had none. Then he thought of Sam Osgood's letter. . . .

Mr. Le Duc Neimors was so excited he could hardly balance his pince-nez on the aquiline bridge of his well-bred nose. It was the first time in the multimillionaire's experience as a collector of early Americana he had ever heard of, let alone been offered, a letter purported to have been written by the first Postmaster General, franked by the First Congress, and containing a crabbed footnote by the distinguished patriot from Pennsylvania who was credited with being the founding father of the postal system. He read the footnote aloud:

Friend Hale:

May I add my gratitude to Sam's for your help in this mat-

ter. I have tried to convince him it is almost certain to degenerate into a purely political office as a party whip and will bring him as many headaches as it will dollars or honors. However, as "Poor Richard" says, "Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."

Cordially,

Ben

The multimillionaire was frank. "If this letter and cover are genuine, they have, from the collector's viewpoint, almost incalculable historic and philatelic value." He showed such sound business sense (plus the aid of two world wars and marriage to a wealthy widow) that he had been able to pyramid a few loaves of bread and seven pounds of hamburger into a restaurant and chain-grocery empire. "But I won't pay a penny more than, say, two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. And that only after an expert of my choice has authenticated both the letter and the cover."

Weinfield, the dealer to whom Ephraim had gone, swallowed hard. "That will be satisfactory."

"E-yah," Ephraim agreed.

He went directly to Eighty-second Street to press his suit with Gertie. It wasn't a difficult courtship. Gertie was tired of reading the Kinsey report and eager to learn more about life at first hand. The Bastard of Bastogne was less enthusiastic. If another male was to be added to the family, he would have preferred one from the Eagle or 10th Armored Division or the 705th Tank Destroyer Battalion. However, on learning his prospective brother-in-law was about to come into a quarter of a million dollars, minus Weinfield's commission, he thawed to the extent of loaning Ephraim a thousand dollars, three hundred and seventy-five of which Gertie insisted Ephraim pay down on a second-hand car.

It was a busy but happy week. There was the matter of learning to drive. There were blood tests to take. There was an apartment to find. Ephraim bought a marriage license, a car license, a driver's license, and a dog license for the blond cocker spaniel that Gertie saw and admired. The principle of easy credit explained to him, he paid twenty-five dollars down and agreed to pay five dollars a week for four years, plus a nominal carrying charge, for a one-thousand-five-

hundred-dollar diamond engagement ring. He paid ten dollars more on a three-piece living room suite and fifteen dollars down on a four-hundred-and-fifty-dollar genuine waterfall seven-piece bedroom outfit. Also, at Gertie's insistence, he pressed a one-hundred-dollar bill into a rental agent's perspiring palm to secure a two-room apartment because it was still under something Gertie called rent control.

His feet solidly on the ground of the brave new America in which he had awakened, Ephraim, for the life of him, couldn't see what Silovitz had been beefing about. E-yah. Neither a man nor a nation could stay stationary. Both had to move with the times. They'd had Silovitzes at Valley Forge, always yearning for the good old days. Remembering their conversation, however, and having reserved the bridal suite at a swank Catskill resort, Ephraim, purely as a precautionary measure, along with his other permits and licenses, purchased a fishing license to make certain nothing would deter or delay the inception of the new family he intended to found.

The sale of Sam Osgood's letter was consummated the following Monday at ten o'clock in Mr. Le Duc Neimors' office. Ephraim and Gertie were married at nine in the City Hall, and after a quick breakfast of dry Martinis she waited in the car with Mr. Gorgeous while Ephraim went up to get the money. The multimillionaire had it waiting, in cash.

"And there you are. Two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

Ephraim reached for the stacked sheaves of bills, wishing he'd brought a sack, and a thin-faced man with a jaundiced eye introduced himself. "Jim Carlyle is the name." He showed his credentials. "Of the Internal Revenue Bureau. And to save any possible complication, I'll take Uncle Sam's share right now." He sorted the sheaves of bills into piles. "We want $156,820 plus $25,000, or a total of $179,570, leaving a balance of $45,430."

Ephraim looked at the residue sourly, and a jovial man slapped his back and handed him a card. "New York State income tax, Mr. Hale. But we won't be hogs. We'll let you off easy. All we want is two per cent up to the first thousand dollars, three per cent on the next two thousand, four per cent on the next two thousand, five per cent on the next two thousand, six per cent on the next two thousand, and seven per cent on everything over nine thousand. If my figures are correct, and

they are, I'll take $2,930.10." He took it. Then, slapping Ephraim's back again, he laughed. "Leaving $42,499.90."

"Ha, ha," Ephraim laughed weakly.

Mr. Weinfield dry-washed his hands. "Now, we agreed on a fifteen per cent commission. That is, fifteen per cent of the whole. And fifteen per cent of $225,000 is $32,750 you owe me."

"Take it," Ephraim said. Mr. Weinfield did, and Ephraim wished he hadn't eaten the olive in his second Martini. It felt as though it had gone to seed and was putting out branches in his stomach. In less than five minutes his quarter of a million dollars had shrunk to $9,749.90. By the time he paid for the things he had purchased and returned Benny's thousand dollars, he would be back where he'd started.

Closing his case, Mr. Carlyle asked, "By the way, Mr. Hale. Just for the record. Where did you file your report last year?"

"I didn't," Ephraim admitted. "This is the first time I ever paid income tax."

Mr. Le Duc Neimors looked shocked. The New York State man looked shocked. Mr. Weinfield looked shocked.

"Oh," Carlyle said. "I see. Well in that case I'd better take charge of this, too." He added the sheaves remaining on the desk to those already in his case and fixed Ephraim with his jaundiced eye. "We'll expect you down at the bureau as soon as it's convenient, Mr. Hale. If there was no deliberate intent on your part to defraud, it may be that your lawyers still can straighten this out without us having to resort to criminal prosecution."

Gertie was stroking the honey-colored Mr. Gorgeous when Ephraim got back to the car. "Ya got it, honey?"

"Yeah," Ephraim said shortly. "I got it."

He jerked the car away from the curb so fast he almost tore out the aged rear end. Her feelings hurt, Gertie sniveled audibly until they'd crossed the George Washington bridge. Then, having suffered in comparative silence as long as she could, she said, "Ya didn't need to bite my head off, Ephraim. And on our honeymoon, too. All I done was ast ya a question."

"Did," Ephraim corrected her.

"Did what?" Gertie asked.

Ephraim turned his head to explain the difference between the past tense and the participle "have done," and Gertie screamed as he almost

collided head on with a car going the other way. Mr. Gorgeous yelped and bit Ephraim on the arm. Then, both cars and excitement being new to the twelve-week-old puppy, he was most inconveniently sick.

On their way again, Ephraim apologized. "I'm sorry I was cross." He was. None of this was Gertie's fault. She couldn't help it if he'd been a fool. There was no need of spoiling her honeymoon. The few hundred in his pockets would cover their immediate needs. And he'd work this out somehow. Things had looked black at Valley Forge, too.

Gertie snuggled closer to him. "Ya do love me, don't ya?"

"Devotedly," Ephraim assured her. He tried to put his arm around her. Still suspicious, Mr. Gorgeous bit him again. Mr. Gorgeous, Ephraim could see, was going to be a problem.

His mind continued to probe the situation as he drove. Things had come to a pretty pass when a nation this size was insolvent, when outgo and deficit spending so far exceeded current revenue that taxes had become confiscatory. There was mismanagement somewhere. There were too many feet under the table. Too many were eating too high off the hog. Perhaps what Congress needed was some of the spirit of '76 and '89. A possible solution of his own need for a job occurred to him. "How," he asked Gertie, "would you like to be the wife of a congressman?"

"I think we have a flat tire," she answered. "Either that, honey, or one of the wheels isn't quite round on the bottom."

She walked Mr. Gorgeous while he changed the tire. It was drizzling by the time they got back in the car. Both the cowl and the top leaked. A few miles past Bear Mountain, it rained. It was like riding in a portable needle shower. All human habitation blotted out by the rain, the rugged landscape was familiar to Ephraim. He'd camped under that great oak when it had been a young tree. He'd fought on the crest of that hill overlooking the river. But what in the name of time had he been fighting for?

He felt a new wave of tenderness for Gertie. This was the only world the child had ever known. A world of Video and installment payments, of automobiles and war, of atom bombs and double talk and meaningless jumbles of figures. A world of confused little men and puzzled, barren women.

"I love you, Gertie," he told her.

She wiped the rain out of her eyes and smiled at him. "I love you,

too. And it's all right with me to go on. But I think we'd better stop pretty soon. I heard Mr. Gorgeous sneeze and I'm afraid he's catching cold."

"Damn Mr. Gorgeous," Ephraim thought. Still, there was sense in what she said. The rain was blinding. He could barely see the road. And somewhere he'd made a wrong turning. They'd have to stop where they could.

The hotel was small and old and might once have been an inn. Ephraim got Gertie inside, signed the yellowed ledger, and saw her and Mr. Gorgeous installed in a room with a huge four-poster bed before going back for the rest of the luggage.

A dried-up descendant of Cotton Mather, the tobacco-chewing proprietor was waiting at the foot of the stairs when he returned sodden with rain and his arms and hands filled with bags.

"Naow, don't misunderstand me, Mr. Hale," the old witch-burner said, "I don't like t' poke m' nose intuh other people's business. But I run a respectable hotel an' I don't cater none t' fly-b'-nights or loose women." He adjusted the glasses on his nose. "Y' sure y' an' Mrs. Hale are married? Y' got anythin' t' prove it?"

Ephraim counted to ten. Then still half-blinded by the rain dripping from the brim of his Homburg, he set the bags on the floor, took an envelope from his pocket, selected a crisp official paper, gave it to the hotel man, picked up the bags again, and climbed the stairs to Gertie.

She'd taken off her wet dress and put on a sheer negligee that set Ephraim's pulse to pounding. He took off his hat, eased out of his sodden coat, and tossed it on a chair.

"Did I ever tell you I loved you?"

Gertie ran her fingers through his hair. "Go ahead. Tell me again."

Tilting her chin, Ephraim kissed her. This was good. This was right. This was all that mattered. He'd make Gertie a good husband. He—

A furtive rap on the door sidetracked his train of thought. He opened it to find the old man in the hall, shaking as with palsy. "Now a look a yere, mister," he whispered. "If y' ain't done it, don't do it. Jist pack yer bags and git." One palsied hand held out the crisp piece of paper Ephraim had given him. "This yere fishin' license ain't for it."

Ephraim looked from the fishing license to his coat. The envelope had fallen on the floor, scattering its contents. A foot away, under the edge of the bed, his puppy eyes sad, Mr. Gorgeous was thoughtfully

masticating the last of what once had been another crisp piece of paper. As Ephraim watched, Mr. Gorgeous burped and swallowed. It was, as Silovitz had said, the little things.

It was three nights later, at dusk, when Mickey spotted the apparition. For a moment he was startled. Then he knew it for what it was. It was Nature Boy, back in costume, clutching a jug of rum to his bosom.

"Hey, mister," Mickey stopped Ephraim. "I been looking all over for you. My cousin's a scout for the Yankees. And when I told him about your whip he said for you to come down to the stadium and show 'em what you got."

Ephraim looked at the boy glass-eyed.

Mickey was hurt by his lack of enthusiasm. "Gee. Ain't you excited? Wouldn't you like to be a big league ball player, the idol of every red-blooded American boy? Wouldn't you like to make a lot of money and have the girls crazy about you?"

The words reached through Ephraim's fog and touched a responsive chord. Drawing himself up to his full height, he clutched the jug still tighter to his bosom with all of the dignity possible to a man without pants.

"Ya fadder's mustache," he said.

Then, staggering swiftly into the cave, he closed the rock door firmly and finally behind him.

Ray Bradbury

NIGHT MEETING

Is it a "real" ghost? Is it two kinds of time crossing? Is it just a delusion? Whatever it is, it is not the sort of event about which one can be pedantically logical. Ray Bradbury has an uncanny ability to make poetic reality out of impossibles and illogicals; and in this tale, one of his long series of dreams about the planet Mars, he has taken a handful of the merest gossamer and woven a quietly luminescent thing of it, a thing you cannot forget.

BEFORE going on up into the blue hills, Tomás Gómez stopped for gasoline at the lonely station.

"Kind of alone out here, aren't you, Pop?" said Tomás.

The old man wiped off the windshield of the small truck. "Not bad."

"How do you like Mars, Pop?"

"Fine. Always something new. I made up my mind when I came here last year I wouldn't expect nothing, nor ask nothing, nor be surprised at nothing. We've got to forget Earth and how things were. We've got to look at what we're in here, and how *different* it is. I get a hell of a lot of fun out of just the weather here. It's *Martian* weather. Hot as hell daytimes, cold as hell nights. I get a big kick out of the different flowers and different rain. I came to Mars to retire and I wanted to retire in a place where everything is different. An old man needs to have things different. Young people don't want to talk to him, other old people bore hell out of him. So I thought the best thing for me is a place so different that all you got to do is open your eyes and you're entertained. I got this gas station. If business picks up too much, I'll move on back to some other old highway that's not so busy, where I can earn just enough to live on and still have time to feel the *different* things here."

"You got the right idea, Pop," said Tomás, his brown hands idly on the wheel. He was feeling good. He had been working in one of the new colonies for ten days straight, and now he had two days off and was on his way to a party.

"I'm not surprised at anything any more," said the old man. "I'm just looking. I'm just experiencing. If you can't take Mars for what she is,

you might as well go back to Earth. Everything's crazy up here, the soil, the air, the canals, the natives (I never saw any yet, but I hear they're around), the clocks. Even my clock acts funny. Even time is crazy up here. Sometimes I feel I'm here all by myself, no one else on the whole damn planet. I'd take bets on it. Sometimes I feel about eight years old, my body squeezed up and everything else tall. Jesus, it's just the place for an old man. Keeps me alert and keeps me happy. You know what Mars is? It's like a thing I got for Christmas seventy years ago—don't know if you ever had one—they called them kaleidoscopes, bits of crystal and cloth and beads and pretty junk. You held it up to the sunlight and looked in through at it, and it took your breath away. All the patterns! Well, that's Mars. Enjoy it. Don't ask it to be nothing else but what it is. Jesus, you know that highway right there, built by the Martians, is over sixteen centuries old and still in good condition? That's one dollar and fifty cents, thanks and good night."

Tomás drove off down the ancient highway, laughing quietly.

It was a long road going into darkness and hills, and he held to the wheel, now and again reaching into his lunch bucket and taking out a piece of candy. He had been driving steadily for an hour, with no other car on the road, no light, just the road going under, the hum, the roar, and Mars out there, so quiet. Mars was always quiet, but quieter tonight than any other. The deserts and empty seas swung by him, and the mountains against the stars.

There was a smell of time in the air tonight. He smiled and turned the fancy in his mind. There was a thought. What did time smell like? Like dust and clocks and people. And if you wondered what time sounded like, it sounded like water running in a dark cave, and voices crying, and dirt dropping down upon hollow box lids, and rain. And, going further, what did time *look* like? Time looked like snow dropping silently into a black room, or it looked like a silent film in an ancient theater, one hundred billion faces falling like those New Year balloons, down and down into nothing. That was how time smelled and looked and sounded. And tonight—Tomás shoved a hand into the wind outside the truck—tonight you could almost *touch* time.

He drove the truck between hills of time. His neck prickled and he sat up, watching ahead.

He pulled into a little dead Martian town, stopped the engine, and let the silence come in around him. He sat, not breathing, looking out at

the white buildings in the moonlight. Uninhabited for centuries. Perfect, faultless; in ruins, yes, but perfect, nevertheless.

He started the engine and drove on another mile or more before stopping again, climbing out, carrying his lunch bucket, and walking to a little promontory where he could look back at that dusty city. He opened his thermos and poured himself a cup of coffee. A night bird flew by. He felt very good, very much at peace.

Perhaps five minutes later there was a sound. Off in the hills, where the ancient highway curved, there was a motion, a dim light, and then a murmur.

Tomás turned slowly with the coffee cup in his hand.

And out of the hills came a strange thing.

It was a machine like a jade-green insect, a praying mantis, delicately rushing through the cold air, indistinct, countless green diamonds winking over its body, and red jewels that glittered with multifaceted eyes. Its six legs fell upon the ancient highway with the sounds of a sparse rain which dwindled away, and from the back of the machine a Martian with melted gold for eyes looked down at Tomás as if he were looking into a well.

Tomás raised his hand and automatically thought Hello! but did not move his lips, for this *was* a Martian. But Tomás had swum in blue rivers on Earth, with strangers passing on the road, and eaten in strange houses with strange people, and his weapon had always been his smile. He did not carry a gun. And he did not feel the need of one now, even with the little fear that gathered about his heart at this moment.

The Martian's hands were empty, too. For a moment they looked across the cool air at each other.

It was Tomás who moved first.

"Hello!" he called.

"Hello!" called the Martian in his own language.

They did not understand each other.

"Did you say hello?" they both asked.

"What did you say?" they said, each in a different tongue.

They scowled.

"Who are you?" said Tomás in English.

"What are you doing here?" in Martian; the stranger's lips moved.

"Where are you going?" they said, and looked bewildered.

"I'm Tomás Gómez."

"I'm Muhe Ca."

Neither understood, but they tapped their chests with the words and then it became clear.

And then the Martian laughed. "Wait!" Tomás felt his head touched, but no hand had touched him. "There!" said the Martian in English. "That is better!"

"You learned my language so quick!"

"Nothing at all!"

Embarrassed with a new silence, they looked at the steaming coffee he had in one hand.

"Something different?" said the Martian, eying him and the coffee, referring to them both, perhaps.

"May I offer you a drink?" said Tomás.

"Please."

The Martian slid down from his machine.

A second cup was produced and filled, steaming. Tomás held it out.

Their hands met and—like mist—fell through each other.

"Jesus Christ!" cried Tomás, and dropped the cup.

"Name of the Gods!" said the Martian in his own tongue.

"Did you see what happened?" they both whispered.

They were very cold and terrified.

The Martian bent to touch the cup but could not touch it.

"Jesus!" said Tomás.

"Indeed." The Martian tried again and again to get hold of the cup, but could not. He stood up and thought for a moment, then took a knife from his belt. "Hey!" cried Tomás.

"You misunderstand; catch!" said the Martian, and tossed it. Tomás cupped his hands. The knife fell through his flesh. It hit the ground. Tomás bent to pick it up but could not touch it, and he recoiled, shivering.

Now he looked at the Martian against the sky.

"The stars!" he said.

"The stars!" said the Martian, looking, in turn, at Tomás.

The stars were white and sharp beyond the flesh of the Martian, and they were sewn into his flesh like scintillas swallowed into the thin, phosphorescent membrane of a gelatinous sea fish. You could see stars flickering like violet eyes in the Martian's stomach and chest, and through his wrists, like jewelry.

"I can see through you!" said Tomás.

"And I through you!" said the Martian, stepping back.

Tomás felt of his own body and, feeling the warmth, was reassured. *I* am real, he thought.

The Martian touched his own nose and lips. *"I* have flesh," he said, half aloud. *"I* am alive."

Tomás stared at the stranger. "And if *I* am real, then *you* must be dead."

"No, you!"

"A ghost!"

"A phantom!"

They pointed at each other, with starlight burning in their limbs like daggers and icicles and fireflies, and then fell to judging their limbs again, each finding himself intact, hot, excited, stunned, awed, and the other, ah yes, that other over there unreal, a ghostly prism flashing the accumulated light of distant worlds.

"I'm drunk," thought Tomás. "I won't tell anyone of this tomorrow, no, no."

They stood there on the ancient highway, neither of them moving.

"Where are you from?" asked the Martian at last.

"Earth."

"What is that?"

"There." Tomás nodded to the sky.

"When?"

"We landed over a year ago, remember?"

"No."

"And all of you were dead, all but a few. You're rare, don't you *know* that?"

"That's not true."

"Yes, dead. I saw the bodies. Black, in the rooms, in the houses, dead. Thousands of them."

"That's ridiculous. We're *alive!"*

"Mister, you're invaded, only you don't know it. You must have escaped."

"I haven't escaped; there was nothing to escape. What do you mean? I'm on my way to a festival now at the canal, near the Eniall Mountains. I was there last night. Don't you see the city there?" The Martian pointed.

Tomás looked and saw the ruins. "Why, that city's been dead thousands of years."

The Martian laughed. "Dead. I slept there yesterday!"

"And I was in it a week ago and the week before that, and I just drove through it now, and it's a heap. See the broken pillars?"

"Broken? Why, I see them perfectly. The moonlight helps. And the pillars are upright."

"There's dust in the streets," said Tomás.

"The streets are clean!"

"The canals are empty right there."

"The canals are full of lavender wine!"

"It's dead."

"It's alive!" protested the Martian, laughing more now. "Oh, you're quite wrong. See all the carnival lights? There are beautiful boats as slim as women, beautiful women as slim as boats, women the color of sand, women with fire flowers in their hands. I can see them, small, running in the streets there. That's where I'm going now, to the festival; we'll float on the waters all night long; we'll sing, we'll drink, we'll make love. Can't you *see* it?"

"Mister, that city is dead as a dried lizard. Ask any of our party. Me, I'm on my way to Green City tonight; that's the new colony we just raised over near Illinois Highway. You're mixed up. We brought in a million board feet of Oregon lumber and a couple dozen tons of good steel nails and hammered together two of the nicest little villages you ever saw. Tonight we're warming one of them. A couple rockets are coming in from Earth, bringing our wives and girl friends. There'll be barn dances and whisky—"

The Martian was now disquieted. "You say it is over *that* way?"

"There are the rockets." Tomás walked him to the edge of the hill and pointed down. "See?"

"No."

"Damn it, there they *are!* Those long silver things."

"No."

Now Tomás laughed. "You're blind!"

"I see very well. You are the one who does not see."

"But you see the new *town,* don't you?"

"I see nothing but an ocean, and water at low tide."

"Mister, that water's been evaporated for forty centuries."

"Ah, now, now, that *is* enough."

"It's true, I tell you."

The Martian grew very serious. "Tell me again. You do not see the

city the way I describe it? The pillars very white, the boats very slender, the festival lights—oh, I see them *clearly!* And listen! I can hear them singing. It's no space away at all."

Tomás listened and shook his head. "No."

"And I, on the other hand," said the Martian, "cannot see what you describe. Well."

Again they were cold. An ice was in their flesh.

"Can it be . . . ?"

"What?"

"You say 'from the sky'?"

"Earth."

"Earth, a name, nothing," said the Martian. *"But* . . . as I came up the pass an hour ago . . ." He touched the back of his neck. "I felt . . ."

"Cold?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Cold again. Oddly. There was a thing to the light, to the hills, the road," said the Martian. "I felt the strangeness, the road, the light, and for a moment I felt as if I were the last man alive on this world. . . ."

"So did I!" said Tomás, and it was like talking to an old and dear friend, confiding, growing warm with the topic.

The Martian closed his eyes and opened them again. "This can only mean one thing. It has to do with time. Yes. You are a figment of the past!"

"No, you are from the past," said the Earth Man, having had time to think of it now.

"You are so *certain*. How can you prove who is from the past, who from the future? What year is it?"

"Two thousand and one!"

"What does that mean to *me?"*

Tomás considered and shrugged. "Nothing."

"It is as if I told you that it is the year 4462853 S.E.C. It is nothing and more than nothing! Where is the clock to show us how the stars stand?"

"But the ruins prove it! They prove that *I* am the future, *I* am alive, *you* are dead!"

"Everything in me denies this. My heart beats, my stomach hungers,

my mouth thirsts. No, no, not dead, not alive, either of us. More alive than anything else. Caught between is more like it. Two strangers passing in the night, that is it. Two strangers passing. Ruins, you say?"

"Yes. You're afraid?"

"Who wants to see the future, who *ever* does? A man can face the past, but to think—the pillars *crumbled,* you say? And the sea empty, and the canals dry, and the maidens dead, and the flowers withered?" The Martian was silent, but then he looked on ahead. "But there they *are.* I *see* them. Isn't that enough for me? They wait for me now, no matter *what* you say."

And for Tomás the rockets, far away, waiting for *him,* and the town and the women from Earth. "We can never agree," he said.

"Let us agree to disagree," said the Martian. "What does it matter who is past or future if we are both alive, for what follows will follow, tomorrow or in ten thousand years. How do you know that those temples are not the temples of your own civilization one hundred centuries from now, tumbled and broken? You do not know. Then don't ask. But the night is very short. There go the festival fires in the sky, and the birds."

Tomás put out his hand. The Martian did likewise in imitation.

Their hands did not touch; they melted through each other.

"Will we meet again?"

"Who knows? Perhaps some other night."

"I'd like to go with you to that festival."

"And I wish I might come to your new town, to see this ship you speak of, to see these men, to hear all that has happened."

"Good-by," said Tomás.

"Good night."

The Martian rode his green metal vehicle quietly away into the hills. The Earth Man turned his truck and drove it silently in the opposite direction.

"Good lord, what a dream that was," sighed Tomás, his hands on the wheel, thinking of the rockets, the women, the raw whisky, the Virginia reels, the party.

How strange a vision was that, thought the Martian, rushing on, thinking of the festival, the canals, the boats, the women with golden eyes, and the songs.

The night was dark. The moons had gone down. Starlight twinkled

on the empty highway where now there was not a sound, no car, no person, nothing. And it remained that way all the rest of the cool dark night.

SINCE, as far as we know, no one has yet invented time travel, it is only logical to assume that if ever it is discovered, it will be in the future. However, if the future possesses a technique for such transportation, why aren't men from the future constantly among us? Why don't all sorts of strange people and machines play havoc among us, or force us to do what they wish, or generally change us from what we are?

The answer, as provided by the authors whose stories are included in this section, is simple: they do. Futurians are constantly among us, they say, in one form or another. And it is only our persistent unwillingness to admit that the impossible is possible that keeps us from recognizing the fact.

H. L. Gold

PERFECT MURDER

Mr. Gold, the editor of Galaxy Science Fiction, *informs me that this story was written long ago (as science fiction years go) on an emergency basis, to fill a hole that appeared suddenly in the magazine in which it was published. All that needs saying is that one could wish for a few more holes for Mr. Gold to fill—if he would fill them all as well as he did this one.*

The following tale is one of those quiet little bits of nonsense that startles the reader into his wits. It does one thing and does it perfectly: it faces up to the old standard paradox of time travel and knocks it out cold. This is one of the more effective ways of handling such funny business: admit that it is funny and start off from there. . . .

HAROLD RANDOM would never have chosen the way he died. He was far too conservative to have deliberately picked such a spectacular death.

Six days a week, for the past seven years, he had left his rooming house at precisely seven-thirty every morning. To say that people set their clocks by him would perhaps be an exaggeration. But it should be a matter of record that when Mr. Feeney, the janitor, saw Random tramping down the stairs from 4M, that industrious gentleman knew the garbage truck would be around in nine minutes.

"Good morning, Mr. Random," he had said two thousand and ninety-three times. "How's the Sewage Disposal Department today?"

"Splendid, Mr. Feeney," Harold Random had generally replied. "We're installing a new wrinkle in shockproof mains this week."

But one morning Random didn't come down. Feeney realized that nothing short of disaster could be responsible.

His first act, therefore, was to run up the stairs to 4M and tap gently. It was just possible that Mr. Random had overslept. When Feeney got no response, he attacked the door with more vigor, pounding the panel. But he couldn't rouse Mr. Random.

Worried, and even somewhat frightened, Feeney called the police. A few minutes later a radio patrol car rolled up before the house.

Two burly policemen burst through the front door.

"Upstairs," Feeney blurted. "Four M."

They bounded up, their guns cautiously ahead of them. When they got to the door of 4M, it took their combined strength to break it down.

A very large living room stood revealed, with a smaller bedroom off to the right. They looked in on overstuffed furniture in the usual green and rust of the more expensive rooming house. Perhaps the only object worthy of attention was the corpse lying near the bile-green armchair.

"It's murder, sure enough," the first policeman said.

"Why couldn't it be suicide?" Feeney asked.

The second policeman pointed to the murder weapon. It was a pretty decrepit revolver, dating back generations. It looked as if it had been oiled with mud and polished with a mailman's sock. It lay almost twenty feet away from the corpse.

"Couldn't he of threw it?" Mr. Feeney asked innocently.

They snorted. After that deduction, the police examined the rooms. As usual, all the windows and doors were locked, and the nearest fire escape was out in the hall, with no convenient ledges that a fiendish acrobat might have been able to use.

They did find a gun permit in one drawer. It belonged to Harold Random, now deceased. The serial number on the gun matched that on the permit.

It was a perfectly ordinary perfect crime. Random had been murdered in a locked room, with a gun that lay twenty feet away, and, as subsequent investigation proved, he hadn't an enemy in the world. Nobody seemed to think him important enough for hatred. All reports agreed that he had been meek and inoffensive.

Random sat in the green easy chair, reading a fascinating book on the great strides London had made in wastage disposal. It was fascinating how an enormous city like London could do away with its sewage and yet keep its water clean.

Harold Random shook his pale, vague head admiringly. Now, take their problem of slum congestion—much greater than New York—

Zzzziiiirrrr. Whoosh!

He leaped out of the green chair, clutching his fascinating book in thin hands that suddenly had gone cold and white. A mechanical

whirring had filled the room. Instantly, air had burst outward, compressing the excessively atmospheric air of the room.

Random dropped his fascinating book. At the other end of the room stood a man, faultlessly dressed.

He was the exact duplicate of Harold Random!

Of course, there were minor details. He looked more muscular, harder, much more fit. And the mustache on his stern upper lip was real black, streaked with interesting gray, instead of Harold's dim, wispy, somewhat straining fringe.

Random abandoned his ridiculous notion, pulled at his collar, for comfort a half size too large.

"Why can't you learn to dress properly?" the other demanded.

But Harold Random wasn't listening. For the first time, he had noticed a compact, glistening mechanism behind the illusion who stood there disapprovingly. It was compact, yet Random couldn't help imagining that it *extended,* somehow, somewhere. Nonsense, of course.

"Who—who are you?" he asked uncertainly.

Raising his neat trousers at the knees just the proper bit, the older man sat distastefully on the squat rust couch. Now that Harold Random felt almost calm, he observed the strong chin, the firm hands, the absolute self-possession of the other. He felt vaguely envious.

"I'm Harold Random," the other man said, more pleasantly. "I know this is quite a shock, but I'm you. You see, I've come from the future. Been dabbling around with time machines for several years, just so I could make this visit. It's very important to both of us."

Random the younger smiled weakly. Weak as that smile was, it angered the other Random.

"Don't be such a sap!" he rapped out. He gestured to the end of the room with a manicured thumb. "There's my time machine. It cuts through the time warp. Time, the fourth dimension, can be traveled as well and easily as any other dimension, provided one has the means. I have. With an elevator or airplane you can rise into the third dimension. With a time machine you can rise above, or descend below, the main stream of time."

"Oh," the younger Random said puzzledly. "I see."

"You don't. But that doesn't matter."

They sat in silence for quite a while. The younger Random was conscious of his prototype's keen and obviously disapproving scrutiny. When the older man spoke, however, it was in soft, winning tones.

"Harold," he said, and then stopped, his dark brows drawn. "I don't know how we should address each other. You'd better call me Mr. Random. Is that all right, Harold?"

Harold nodded bafflledly. So far, it was the only touch of logic in an insane situation.

"Well," Mr. Random continued, "what date is this?"

He strode to the tired end table, which seemed barely able to sustain the weight of an evening paper.

"December 11, 1941. H-m-m-m. Then Marguerite hasn't married that ugly ape yet. You know—Will Hanson."

"Will Hanson?" Harold asked. Then the significance of the small word struck him. "What do you mean, she hasn't married him *yet?* She is supposed to marry me."

Mr. Random leaned forward, his immaculate elbows on his sharply creased knees.

"That's why I'm here, Harold," he said gently. "You know you haven't been making much progress with her. She's such a lovely thing, even without her fortune, that I know you'd hate to lose her. Well, let me tell you plainly—on January 11, next year, she's going to marry Will Hanson."

"Oh, but—" Harold protested in his usual diffident way.

"But nothing! You and your damned sewage disposal. Is that all you can talk about to her and her father?"

Harold sat back primly.

"Marguerite and her father are very intelligent. They encourage me in every way. They always prompt me to talk on the subject."

"Sure! Sarcasm always was wasted on you."

Another bitter silence filled the depressing rust and green room. Now that Harold thought back, he could detect signs of irony in their leading questions. But his enthusiasm for his job had been so keen, he would have spoken to a gorilla with the same boring, extensive detail.

"Anyhow," Mr. Random said, "she's under pressure from her pa. Why she should love an object like you, I don't know, but she does. In January, though, what with high pressure from pa and Willie, and your general lack of everything, she is going to take the leap.

"I've just come from sixteen years in the future. Let me tell you, Harold—Marguerite then is even more beautiful and rich than she is now. If you don't let me—"

Harold had come to his feet slowly. The foreshadow of the stern,

aggressive Harold Random he was to become showed in the jut of his chin.

"I don't follow," he said uneasily.

Mr. Random got to his feet and began pacing energetically.

"You don't want to lose Marguerite, and neither do I. But you're incapable of handling her. Well," he stopped pacing, faced Harold determinedly, "you and I will change places. You go into the future. I'll stay here. You can have everything I've amassed, really quite a lot. In sixteen years you can also have Marguerite. O.K.?"

"I should say not! You want her youth!"

Mr. Random was outraged.

"Her youth! I'd rather have her sixteen years from now. But rather than let an idiot like you—"

This was too much for even the meek young Harold Random. He stood, really quite belligerently, toe to toe with his older self.

"I've stood for enough," he stated. "You're trying to get me out of the way so you can step in. You know I'll win her anyhow!"

"The hell you will," Mr. Random replied furiously. "You couldn't win in a rigged lottery. Get into that time machine!"

Random the younger stood decisively where he was.

"Oh, you won't, eh?" Mr. Random snapped.

He seemed to know his way about quite well. That was perhaps the only thing that might have shaken Harold's determination, had he not been so stubbornly determined. Mr. Random pulled out a drawer of the bureau in the small bedroom. When he returned he held a gun. He stopped at the end of the living room.

"Get in that time machine!" he repeated harshly. "I'm going to count to three," he said. "If you aren't in there voluntarily—"

"Go ahead," Harold invited heroically. "This is just a bluff."

"One—"

Harold gaped at the black hole of the muzzle. It was very large.

"Two—"

At that moment Harold's nerve broke. He made a fierce dive for the stern figure at the other end of the room. Mr. Random must have been holding in his fiery temper with a terrific effort.

"Oh, trying to put up a fight, eh?" he barked. He fired once.

That didn't seem to satisfy him. Even as Harold dropped, writhing, he wasn't satisfied. He jerked at the trigger again, viciously, until Harold gave a strangled last cry.

Unnnnnnnnnnn!

The highly compressed air suddenly went back to normal. Where the glittering machine had stood, there was nothing. The poorly-cared-for gun clattered to the floor.

For there was no hand to hold it. Harold Random lay alone in death, the murder weapon almost twenty feet from him. And, naturally, there were only his own fingerprints all over everything, including the gun.

Mr. Random had overshot his mark. By destroying Harold, he had annihilated himself.

And Will Hanson married Marguerite on January 11.

E. M. Hull

THE FLIGHT THAT FAILED

How *did we win the war against Nazi Germany? At what moment did that victory become inevitable? None of us really knows the answer, of course. Perhaps it was a completely unlikely incident that tilted the scales our way—an incident like the one reported in this eerie story by Edna Mayne Hull, wife of A. E. Van Vogt and superior science-fiction writer in her own right. Perhaps the moon-reflected futurian she describes really succeeded in deflecting the Nazi bullets at that crucial moment, and thus helped the world we know to avoid becoming the world that was pictured in the little black book. If this is so, of course, some remarkable events are likely to happen in our own immediate future. . . .*

THE white crescent of moon flitted from cloud to cloud, as if it, too, was a great, three-engined plane charging high above the night waters of the northern Atlantic.

Twice, when its shape was partly hidden by a woolpack of a cloud, the illusion of another plane with all lights on was so vivid that Squadron Leader Clair stiffened, fingers instinctively reaching for the radio switch, and words quivering on his lips to warn the silly fool out there that this was war and that, within half an hour, they would enter the danger zone.

Reflections, Clair muttered the second time, damn those reflections of that bright, glowing moon.

In the half light, he turned to Flying Officer Wilson, but, for a moment, so dazzling was the play of moon rays through the domed glass cockpit that—for that prolonged instant—the navigator's body seemed to shine, as if a million glittering reflections were concentrated on his long, powerful frame.

Clair shook his head to clear his vision, and said, "Never saw the moon so bright. Puts one in mind of the old folk tales about the power of the moonbeams to conjure shapes, to reflect strange things that do not exist—"

His voice trailed. He squinted at the man beside him. With a tiny start, he saw that it was not Wilson but one of the passengers. The fellow said in a quiet voice, "How goes it?"

It was not the words themselves but a suggestive quality in the tone that, for a moment, brought to Clair a pleasant kaleidoscope of memory: his family home on the lower St. Lawrence; his mother, tall and serene; his calm-eyed father; and his younger sister soon to be married.

He shook the picture out of his brain, a little irritated; they were private possessions, not to be shared by any chance interrogator. Besides, here was merely some faint heart requiring reassurance about the flight.

"Everything's fine!" Clair said; and then in a precise voice, he added, "I'm sorry, sir, passengers are not allowed in the cockpit. I must ask you to—"

For a second time, then, he stopped in the middle of a sentence and stared.

It was hard to see the man's face; the moon made a dazzling, reflecting fire where it splashed against his skin and body. But what Clair could make out against that surprising glare was finely constructed, a strangely strong, sensitive countenance with gray eyes that smiled a secret smile and gazed steadily, expectantly, across at him. A tremendously interesting face it was, only—

It was not the face of any one of the passengers.

With a gasp, Clair ran his mind over the passengers, as he had checked them in hours before. Typical, they had been, two dozen of them. A sprinkling of diplomats, a little troop of military men, and a faded group of civil servants, including one government scientist.

He remembered them all vividly, and this man had not been— Beside him, the stranger said quietly, "I wish to report my presence aboard your ship!"

"You . . . WHAT?" said Clair; and his amazement was all the more violent because his mind had already led him to the very verge of the truth.

The man made no reply, simply sat there smiling quietly—and the moon, which had momentarily flashed behind a cloud, jerked into sight again and rode the dark blue heavens to the south-southwest.

The light shattered into blazing fragments on the cockpit glass, and cascaded like countless tiny jewels, bathing the stranger in a shield of radiance.

Swiftly, Clair drew his mind into a tight acceptance of the situation that was here. His eyes narrowed; his face took on a stern expression. When he finally spoke, it was the squadron leader, commander of men, who said curtly, "I have no idea why you have chosen to stow yourself on this ship, nor do I desire any details. It is my duty to place you in irons until we land in England."

With a flick of his hand he drew his automatic—as the cockpit door opened and vaguely silhouetted the bulky figure that was Wilson.

"Queerest thing that ever happened to me, Bill," the flying officer began. "One second I was sitting beside you, the next I was lying in the baggage compartment. I must have walked in my sleep and . . . oh!"

His eyes glinted steely blue in the moonlight as he sent one swift glance at the gun in Clair's fingers, then flashed his gaze to the stranger.

"Trouble?" he said, and snatched his own gun.

It was the stranger who shook his head. "No trouble at the moment," he said. "But there is going to be in a half an hour. They've found out about your cargo, and the attack will be in force." He finished softly, "You will need me then."

For a single, appalled moment Clair blanched. "You know about our cargo!" he said harshly; and then, dismayed by his own admission, snapped, "Flying Officer Wilson, you will take this man to the baggage room, search him, and put the irons on him. If he goes quietly, keep your gun in your pocket. No use alarming the passengers unnecessarily."

"I shall go quietly," said the stranger.

Almost disconcerted by the man's acquiescence, Clair watched him being led through the moonlit cabin. The affair seemed unsatisfactory —unfinished.

Ten minutes later, the first distant streaks of dawn tinted the long, dark waters to the east, but the crescent moon was still master of the sky. Clair sat at the controls, his forehead twisted into a worried frown. Only occasionally did he glance at the flying shape of light that, for so many hours now, had flooded the night and the sea with its brilliance.

His brow cleared finally. Because—there was nothing to do but carry on. He turned to Wilson to say something to that effect; the navigator's voice cut off his words: "Bill!"

With a start, Clair saw that his friend was gazing with a tensed fixedness into the mirror that showed the long, dimly visible passenger

cabin. His own gaze flicked up, strained against the quiet gloom that was out there. But there was nothing.

The moon glowed in through the dozen windows, probing at the passengers with soft fingers of light. Some of the men were sleeping, heads nodding low, their faces shadowed by their posture. Others sat talking; and their countenances, too, made patterns of light and shade that shifted, as they moved, into a thousand subtly different umbral effects.

It was a restful scene, utterly normal. A puzzled question was forming on Clair's lips, when once more, urgently, Wilson spoke. "The third seat from the back—the fellow leaning across the aisle talking to Lord Laidlaw, the British diplomatic agent—it's *him*."

Clair saw. Very slowly he stood up. He had no real sense of abnormal things. "Take the wheel, sir," he said. "I'll go see what's what."

Wilson said, "I'll keep an eye on you."

As Clair squeezed out into the passenger cabin, the stranger looked up. It seemed impossible that the fellow was able to see him, where there were only shadows, where the moonlight did not penetrate, but he must have. He smiled, said something to his lordship, and then stood up.

Clair's fingers flashed to his gun, then relaxed as the man turned his back and, walking to the rear of the aisle, sank into a double seat that was there.

Once more he looked up, seemingly straight into Clair's eyes. He beckoned Clair to the vacant seat beside him. The squadron leader approached hesitantly. There was something very strange here, but his mind wouldn't quite hurdle over the strangeness.

He loomed over the man, then, frowning, sank down beside him. He said curtly, "How did you break out of those irons?"

There was no immediate answer, and, for the thousandth time in that long night, Clair grew conscious of the intense brilliance of the moon. Crescent-shaped, it raced high in the heavens to the south-southwest, and it did shining things to the broad, dark belly of the sea. The water seemed as near as the night and, like ridges of glass, sent up a shadowed blaze of reflections.

Reflections that caught his eyes and made it preternaturally hard for him to look intently at the stranger, as the man said, "I didn't think you would believe me if I told you that the irons would be useless against me. Accordingly, I am letting the fact speak for itself."

Clair made an impatient gesture. He felt a genuine irritation at the other for talking nonsense now, when the zone of danger was so incredibly near.

"Look here," he snapped, "it is within my authority to put a bullet in you if I consider that your presence will endanger this ship. Who are you?"

"Let me understand you," the man said, and his voice was curiously troubled. "You see nothing unusual in the fact that I *have* broken out of the irons?"

"Obviously," said Clair, "you're one of those people with very small hands."

"I see." The man was silent; then: "This is going to be even more difficult than I imagined. I thought that my escaping from your manacles would release you to a small degree from your normal mental inhibitions."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm afraid," was the strangely sad reply, "I'm afraid you wouldn't understand. If I could convince you I would tell you my identity, but your mind is too enthralled by the practical world in which you have your being. By a trick, by means of a moon-ray time reflector machine, I have established my existence in that world, and now you accept me. But I am afraid I shall have to plan my purpose around that limited fact. I had hoped you would free all my enormous strength but—"

He broke off, then finished, "Your friend searched me and found no weapons; therefore you should not object to letting me sit here till the destroyer planes come. Even under the terrible handicap of your reality, I think I can save you then."

Clair had listened to the unfolding words with the growing, empty conviction that he was talking to a madman. Now, for a moment, he cursed silently the incredibly bad luck that had forced such a situation upon him in this, his most important flight. He began angrily, "I don't know what kind of nonsense you've got in your mind, but I'll tell you this much: if a flight of Messerschmitts attack us in the next forty minutes, our machine guns won't be much good. In any event, they'll be manned by Flying Officer Wilson, Colonel Ingraham, and Major Gray. If you have some queer idea that you—"

He cut himself off decisively: "I'm afraid I have no choice but to put the irons on you again. They're adjustable, and this time I'll see that they don't slip off."

The man nodded gravely and without a word led the way back to the baggage compartment.

Returning forward, Clair paused beside Lord Laidlaw. He said, "For your private information, sir, the man to whom you were talking a minute ago is a stowaway. I would like to ask you what he said to you."

His lordship was a plump-faced man with keen, grayish eyes. He fixed them shrewdly on the squadron leader. "Funny chap," he commented finally. "Had a hard time seeing him because of the way the moon kept shining in his face. I'm afraid his remarks were very trite, though they stirred some pleasant memories and generally titillated the idealistic side of my nature. He asked me how it went with me and my family."

Frowning, Clair strode on to the cockpit.

The light in the east was stronger, a world of graying shadows that streaked the gray-dark waters, and all the horizon glowed with that first faint promise of a brilliant morning.

Some of the ice began to thaw out of Clair's mind; the new lines of worry in his forehead smoothed, and an eager expectancy crept into his eyes.

"Well—" he finished the low-voiced discussion with Wilson, "we're agreed. I've already set the ship in its new course. If anyone is seeking a rendezvous with us on the basis of secret knowledge of our planned course, they'll have to look again. I—" He stopped as the cockpit door tilted open and the semibald head of Lord Laidlaw was outlined in the gloom of the door's shadow.

"Er," said his lordship, "that fellow has come back into the passenger cabin. You said you had put him in irons, so I thought I'd better mention it."

Clair spun out of his seat. "By God!" he flared, "that fellow's hands mustn't actually be any larger than his wrists. He's been selected for this job, and I'm going to find out what it is."

His fury sustained him as he hurried along the aisle. But it died abruptly as he paused and stood, frankly nonplused, staring down at the fellow. The vague wish came that the moon would go behind a cloud so that he might get a really good look at the interloper.

Before he could narrow his complex thoughts into words, the stranger said in an astoundingly stern voice, "I hope you have sufficient

imagination to be convinced that you cannot imprison me. I assure you that time is short."

Clair sank down in the seat beside the other. "Look here," he said in his most reasonable voice, "you don't seem to realize the seriousness of your actions. Now tell me, how *did* you get out of those irons?"

Through the unnaturally radiant reflections of the crescent moon, Clair saw that the stranger was staring at him steadily. The man said finally, slowly, "Squadron Leader Clair—you see, I know your name —I am aboard this ship to save it from what will be, without my aid, certain destruction. There are two ways in which I can do that. The first is, if you remain ignorant of my identity and allow me, when the enemy comes, to operate one of your machine guns. This is by far the best method because it involves no mental contortions on the part of you or your passengers. You simply continue to accept me automatically as a physical entity. Do anything you please to protect yourself; keep pistols trained on me—anything; but in the final issue, do not try to stop me from using a machine gun."

"Look here"—Clair spoke wearily—"you've already undermined my career simply by being aboard. I'll have to explain my negligence in not discovering you before we took off, and I can just see myself adding that I substituted you for Colonel Ingraham on one of the machine guns."

He stared at the other with earnest conviction in his mind that he was persuading an unbalanced person. "I'm putting it that way," he said, "so that you will see my side and realize the impossibility of your request. You've got some idea that we have a valuable cargo aboard. You're mistaken. You—"

He had intended to turn again to persuasion, but a new thought brought him to frowning pause: If he could slowly change the subject and— He said swiftly, "By the way, what *do* you think we have aboard?"

The man told him quietly, and Clair changed color. He sat for a moment as still as death, all purpose forgotten before the tremendous fact that the man actually did know. Then, white and grim, he said, "I admit it's a valuable load, but only in the narrow sense of the word. Its value is little more than a hundred thousand dollars. I can't see the German Air Command wasting time trying to trap a plane whose take-off time they could not possibly know, especially when their inter-

ceptor planes would be so much better occupied trying to sink the ships of that convoy we passed half an hour ago."

He grew aware that the stranger was staring at him with a melancholy sardonicism. The man said, "Squadron Leader Clair, there has never been a more valuable cargo shipped. Its destruction changed the course of world history."

"Its destruction!" echoed Clair; then he caught himself. He gathered the realities of his situation back into his brain. There was no longer any doubt: here beside him was a raving madman and— The man was speaking again. "In searching me, your friend refrained from removing a book which is in my right coat pocket. I had this book printed under great difficulties in what used to be New York City, and I would like you to glance at page twenty-seven, and read there part of the description of the flight of this ship, and what followed when it was shot down and lost with all on board."

Clair took the book, and there was not a thought in his head as he stared down at it. There was a feeling in him that he was dreaming, and the unreal effect was augmented by the way he had to bring the book close to his eyes and hold it just so to let the moonlight fall on it.

Page 27, he saw, was heavily underscored. The first paragraph, so marked, read:

> The two-engined transport NA-7044 left its Newfoundland airport at 9:00 P.M., November 26, and was shot down at 4:12 A.M. the following morning, both times being Greenwich, and in the year 1942 A.D., which was in the curious, old chronology. The chief pilot was Squadron Leader Ernest William Clair, a very practical and conscientious young man. The passengers included Thomas Ahearn, admiralty agent, John Leard Capper, American government physicist, Lord Laidlaw, who was returning to England after having failed in his mission to . . .

Clair tore his gaze from the page; his thought scurried madly back to the phrase that had struck him like a blow. "Good God!" he gasped. "Where did you get that plane number? No one knew definitely which plane was going out until late last night."

"You poor fool!" the stranger said sadly. "You still think in terms of your reality. If you continue so blind, there is no hope."

Clair scarcely heard. He was jerking up his wrist, peering at the

watch that was strapped there. He felt a strange heady shock as he saw the time.

It was exactly seven minutes before four.

For Clair, the strange thing in that tensed, startled moment was that he became aware of the throbbing of the engines. The sound, so long subdued by familiarity that it scarcely ever touched his consciousness, was a whine that sawed along his nerves. His brain twanged with that poignant and ceaseless roar.

Through the fury of the beating motors, he heard himself say coldly, "I don't know what your game is, but the very elaborateness of your preparations proves that the most drastic measures are in order. Therefore—"

He paused wildly, stunned by the dark and deadly intention in his brain: to shoot, not to kill but to incapacitate.

The stranger's voice cut across his stark hesitation. "All this that you have seen and heard; and it means nothing to you. Does your mind simply reject the very intrusion of a new idea? What is there about Good that, at certain stages of its development, it falters and stands trembling and blind on the edge of the abyss, while Evil, ablaze with a rejuvenated imagination, strides to its dreadful victory?

"I can see now that for me, here, success in the great way is impossible. But try, try to lift your mind above this binding sense of duty and —let me handle the machine gun. Will you promise?"

"No!" Clair spoke with the distinct finality of one who was utterly weary of the subject. Squadron Leader Ernest William Clair, D.F.C., went on, "You will refrain from further attempts, please, to embellish on this fantastic story. When we reach England I shall have you arrested as a spy, and your explanation will have to be very good indeed if you hope even to account for what you have already revealed. It will be assumed—and it is you who will have to prove otherwise—that your purpose aboard this ship was destructive and—"

His voice faded. Clair swallowed hard, and the thought that came was like a black tidal wave that swept him to his feet with a cry. He drew his gun and backed hastily along the aisle, holding it tense.

From the corners of his eyes he saw heads jerk up and passengers twist in their seats. He had their attention, and he said swiftly, in a clear, ringing voice, "Gentlemen, we have a stowaway aboard; and, as I am unable to obtain a coherent story from him, I must assume that he might have smuggled a bomb aboard. He keeps repeating that this

ship is to be destroyed within fifteen or twenty minutes—the exact hour he mentions is twelve minutes after four—so it could be a time bomb.

"Hunt for that bomb! Everyone, out of your seats! This is no time for niceties. Down on your knees, search every corner, every compartment—and someone scramble into the tail. Use flashlights, but keep them pointed at the floor. Now, hurry!"

An officer with a deep voice said quietly, "Sirs, let us make this thorough. Civilians and military are about equally represented aboard. The civilians take the rear, the soldiers the front."

Clair added swiftly, "I suggest a cursory search of one minute, followed by a detailed examination. Is that satisfactory, Colonel Ingraham?"

"Excellent!" said the colonel.

It was the strangest thing in the world, standing there in that swift, darkened plane, half watching the shapes of the men as they crawled around, peering under seats, poking into bags, examining racks—half watching the stranger, who sat like a graven image, face turned into the flood rays of the moon, which was farther to the rear of the ship now, its strong, refulgent light pouring in through the windows at a distinct angle.

The man said slowly, without bitterness but with infinite sadness, "This futile search, when all you have to do is to look in your own minds. The seeds of your destruction are there. If this ship is lost, freedom goes with it. There are no other key points in our time. Once more: Will—you—let—me handle that machine gun?"

"No!" said Clair; and there was silence between them in that hurtling, moonlit ship.

The white moonlight made a network of dim light, casting long shadows across the dark cabin, doing distorting things to the straining faces of the men as they searched. Flashlights glowed cautiously at brief intervals, peering into dark corners, glaring hard against shiny surfaces.

Three—then five minutes; and they were all back in the cabin. They formed a dark cluster around Clair where he stood, his revolver trained on the interloper. Their faces, out of the direct line of moonlight that streamed through the faintly shuddering windows, formed a series of roughly circular light splotches.

Only the stranger was in the light, and he was silent. Clair explained briefly what had happened and what precautions he had taken. He

finished, "So you see, we had him in irons twice; and each time he came out here. Did you examine them, Lord Laidlaw, when you were in the baggage room, as I suggested?"

"Yes." The nobleman spoke briskly. "They were still locked. I should say that we have here one of those curious people who can contract their palms to the size of their wrists."

"In my opinion," said Colonel Ingraham, "this man is mad. The story he told you is definitely that of an unbalanced person. The solution is to put the irons on him *out here,* and have him under guard till we land."

"There's one point," interrupted a very clear, incisive voice. "This is Ahearn speaking, by the way, Thomas Ahearn of the admiralty—one point: You mentioned that he showed you a book and that it contained—what?"

Clair handed the volume over quietly. "If you'll bend down toward the floor," he suggested, "you can use your flashlight on it."

Men pushed past him to get around the admiralty man; then a light gleamed; then—

"Why, it contains some queer account of the flight of this plane, with all our names."

"Is my name there?" came a new voice from the back of the mass. "Brown—Kenneth Brown!"

"Yes, it's here." It was Ahearn who answered.

"But that's impossible!" Brown ejaculated. "I didn't know until two hours before we left that I would be on this plane. How could anybody find that out, write it up, and publish a book about it—and, for heaven's sake, why would they want to?"

Clair stood very still; and the queerest feeling came that he was listening to his own voice saying these shallow, useless words, making protests about the impossibility of it all, crying out to the idolatrous god of logic with a parrotlike fanaticism, and never once *thinking* about—anything.

He glanced automatically at his watch, tensed a little, and said tautly, "Gentlemen! If you will allow me, I shall ask the prisoner one question."

It took a moment for silence to settle, but he needed the time to frame the incredible question that was in his mind. He said finally, "Stranger, when did you come aboard this ship? I said—when?"

The man's eyes were steady pools; his face grew noticeably more dis-

tinct. "I heard you, Squadron Leader Clair. To you alone, for your consideration, I say: I came aboard about forty minutes ago. Think of that; think it through; don't let it go."

Exclamations blurred across his last words; then Colonel Ingraham snapped angrily, "Sir, we haven't time to bother with this person. Let us iron him and set a guard over him."

Clair's brain was like rigid metal. The stiff feeling came that he ought to turn and apologize to the others for his utterly ridiculous question. But there was a fascination in his mind that held him spellbound; and finally a thought that was a twisting, irresistible force. He said, "What is your real reason for being aboard this ship?"

The reply was a shrug; then: "I'm sorry; I see I was mistaken about you. I've already told you in effect that this is a key flight in history. It *must* get through; it can only get through with my help."

He shrugged again, then finished, "I notice that you have shifted the course of the ship. That is good, that is something. It has already broken the hard thrall of events, and the attack will be delayed. But that delay will be small—out of all proportion to the extent of your change of course. Seven, eight minutes at most."

For a second time Clair was silent. The thought came that the shadows of the early morning and the dazzling crescent moon were affecting his mind. For, incredibly, he was not rejecting a single word; for him, for this moment, this man's every word formed a species of reason and—

And he'd better be careful, or he'd be out of the service for being a credulous fool. He, whose nickname at training school had been Solidhead Clair, *credulous!*

So swiftly came revulsion. He shook himself and said, striving for coldness, "Now that we have verified that there are no bombs aboard, I think Colonel Ingraham's suggestion is the best: In irons, under armed guard, out here. Colonel Ingraham and Major Gray, I suggest you man the machine guns to which you were previously assigned—"

His voice trailed off, for the stranger was staring at him with a bitter anguish. "You blind fool. I can only exist if you sustain the illusion that is me with your minds; and that illusion would collapse instantly if I had to sit out here in chains, under guard. Accordingly, I must leave; and the first hope, and the best, is gone. Now you must *know* my identity. When you need me, call—but there will be no answer unless you call with understanding. Good-by."

For an instant, so determinedly did Clair's mind refuse to accept the absence of the form that had been there that he blinked.

Then the thought came that the moon was too bright and that dazzling reflections of its white, too white rays were playing tricks with his eyes. And then—

Reality penetrated the absence, the utter absence, of the stranger.

They searched the ship as the dawn in the east grew noticeably stronger, casting its pale, wan glow over all the sky ahead and all the forward sea. Only the west behind them remained dark; and the moon was there, a shining, hurtling shape, yielding not yet to the brightness of the new day.

And it was exactly 4:12 by the glowing hands of Clair's wrist watch as the men grudgingly gave up their vain search.

"Funniest thing that ever happened!" a voice tilted against the dimness. "Did we dream that?"

"I could swear he dived for the floor just before he vanished," said a second voice. "He must be somewhere. If we could shift some of that baggage—"

"At least"—it was the man Brown—"we've still got his book."

Twelve minutes after four.

Clair raced along the aisle to the cockpit. "Anything?" he said to Wilson. "See anything—any planes?"

He stared with Wilson and with Major Gray, who was at the port machine gun, into the brightening world. But there was nothing, not a speck, nothing but the sky and the sea and the—moon!

It glittered at him and hurtled along through the blue-dark heaven; and the thought came to Clair: the silvery crescent moon—creating—reflections—

4:14 A.M.

And he felt no relief; for he *had* changed the course, and the man had said it would mean only infinitesimal delay.

Minutes, and then—bullets crashing into them all, a terrible fusillade that would burn and tear and destroy the whole world—unless—

Unless he called with understanding of identity! But how could he ever understand? There were no clues, nothing but a scatter of meaningless words, nothing but—death.

A man whose hands flicked out of handcuffs, who talked of key points in history, who had a book that described this flight and the destruction of all on board, described it as a past event. The book—

He was out in the dimness that was the cabin. "The book!" he called. "Who's got the book that chap left?"

"Right here," said Kenneth Brown. The passengers were all in their seats. "I've been reading out passages. Damnedest, queerest book I ever laid eyes on. It's actually got my name in it"—he couldn't seem to get over the wonder of it—"my name, imagine that. You've got to give these Germans credit—"

The funny thing, Clair thought—no, the incredible tragedy of all this was that their minds wouldn't accept what their eyes had seen. Something shaped like a human being had come into their midst, then vanished before their eyes—and their brains simply skittered over the impossible event; and now they sat here like so many spectators who had been entertained by a magician, wondering in a thrilled, unworried fashion how the devil the trick had been worked.

Danger, the black and deadly danger—they saw it not, but blindly chattered on about everything except the reality.

"Show him the frontispiece!" A voice cut into his burning reverie. "That's the real giveaway. It's in German."

The man Brown echoed, "Absolutely, the whole frontispiece in German. Look, the name of that city."

The book was held up into the light of the moon; a shadowed finger pointed. Clair strained and read:

Zweiundvierzigste Strasse
Hitlerstadt, Nord-Amerika
743 N.H.

"What gets me," said Brown, "is that 743 N.H. at the bottom. It's senseless."

Clair said grayly, *"Nach Hitler."* It was funny how he knew, but he did, with utter certainty— "After Hitler. Seven hundred and forty-three years after. Hitlerstadt is, of course, the city we now call New York."

There was a ripple of laughter, and somebody said, "Wha' did he say? Wha' did he say?"

The sentence was repeated, but the man did not echo the laughter. "Oh," he said, "oh, I'm glad somebody's got a sense of humor. I've just been sitting here thinking if this might not be some manifestation of a secret enemy weapon. And I must say, I couldn't think of how they could have worked it."

There was more laughter. It was amazing to Clair how good-humored they had become. Somebody whispered to him, "That's Capper, the scientist."

"I know!" Clair nodded. He was thinking desperately: If he could keep them thinking it was all humor, and yet gain information— He said, straining for lightness but heavy and cold with the import of his words:

"Professor Capper, we might as well carry this through: Is there a theory of time which would explain how an event which has already occurred can be changed, so that something entirely different would transpire?"

"Of course, of course." The scientist spoke irritably. "The world is full of nonsensical ideas. Everything's been thought of—everything. Trust human beings to waste their time with such stuff."

Clair fought an inner battle to keep his fingers from grabbing the other's neck and shaking the explanation out of him. The sense of urgency in him was so great that his voice trembled as he said, "For the sake of curiosity, what is the theory?"

"Why, it's nothing but the old factor of—"

The plane swerved in a dizzy, twisting dive that sent Clair hurtling against a seat. He caught the plush back of the chair with a grip that nearly tore his muscles from his body.

There followed a sickening moment when the only sound was the shrill whine of the engines in the full fury of a power dive; and then—

Glass splintered. Bullets smashed against shiny woodwork and screeched on metal. From somewhere near, a man screamed in the agony of death. Clair cursed aloud with a terrible understanding. The great transport plane had been swept from tail to nose by machine-gun fire.

He managed to wedge his body into the comparative stability and safety of the seat opposite the scientist, Capper—and through the window he saw the silver thin planes of the crooked cross, black pencils against the lightening sky.

Three of them darted past his narrow line of vision, like black angels gleaming in the moonlight, reflections of malignant beauty—

The thought came to Clair that he ought to be struggling to reach the cockpit and that he was ruining himself by sitting here, ruining his great record, ruining himself in the eyes of the passengers.

Ruin—utter ruin—

And it mattered not. The thoughts were in his mind, but they were like burning phantoms, consuming their own substance, completely uncorrelatable to physical action. In his brain was one purpose, one unquenchable and tremendous purpose.

He leaned over to the scientist; he half shouted, "What is this theory of time?"

He braced himself for a verbal explosion, a tongue flaying that would sear his brain, an opinion about an officer neglecting his duty that would sting in his memory throughout all time. And there was a picture in his mind, a vivid, terrifying picture, of how the question he had asked would sound in court-martial testimony.

It mattered not. All the certainties, the motivations that had ruled his brain in the past seemed remote and unreal. There was only—

"Professor Capper, that time theory of which you spoke?"

"Young man," came the reply, "you amaze me; your courage, your calmness— Thank you, sir, for being so matter of fact. Your example saved me from making a cowardly fool of myself. But I'm under control now—and you're right, there is no reason why we shouldn't discuss science or pseudoscience—"

Clair stared blankly; then came a brief, dark astonishment at the other's unexpected reaction. It was a form of hysteria, of course; and there was ego here, an utter acceptance that a plane commander would, in a crisis, waste his time talking to a passenger. But—

For *his* purpose, it was as if God Himself had reached forth His magic hand and rendered everything easy. Fighting for control, Clair said, "Professor, the time theory—give it to me as succinctly as possible."

"A lot of nonsense, of course," the man rumbled, "but fascinating to talk about under such conditions. Probable worlds! Imagine that—"

His voice trailed off; Clair heard him muttering something more about nonsense—and trembled so violently that he could hardly stay in his seat.

"Probable worlds? What do you mean?"

"What I said. Suppose the ancient Sea peoples had conquered Egypt; suppose Xerxes had defeated the Greek states; suppose the Moors had overrun Europe; suppose the Germans won this war; suppose—"

"But how does that fit the theory?"

In the light of the moon the thin face of the professor frowned at Clair. "Don't be so impatient. There is no hurry. The attack isn't over

yet, and we might as well talk. I want to thank you again for making it possible for me to face this situation with a fearlessness I never expected was in me. It feels great, wonderful. It—"

The twisting thought came to Clair that he would have to tell this loquacious savant the truth. He parted his lips—and then, through the window, he saw the black shape swoop in from the north.

"Duck!" he yelled, and jerked himself flat on the aisle floor as the plane crackled and reverberated with the bullets that tore along its length.

A heavy body collapsed on top of Clair. At least, it felt unbearably heavy at the moment of fall, only it was surprisingly easy to lift the professor's slight form back into his seat. The man crouched there, coughing a little, mumbling to himself.

Cold with the certainty of what had happened, Clair shook the drooping body. "Professor—"

The head lifted wearily, and a strong glow of moonlight reflected from a pair of small, watery eyes.

"Never so proud," came the mumble. "Never thought I'd face death like this. How can we lose this war if even I—"

"The time theory!" Clair croaked.

"Oh, yes, the old business of probables— You're the bravest man I ever met, Squadron Leader, to carry on such a conversation; and I'm not so bad myself. Tell them that, eh? Tell them we talked about . . . about time theories, about worlds and men that might have existed if —something hadn't happened. Of course, to the theorist, those worlds do exist; that is, some projection of them, something of the spirit that carried on—"

"Professor, that stranger—he claimed to be from the future that would exist if we lost this war—"

For an instant, after Clair had spoken, the scientist's watery eyes brightened; he mumbled, "So that's what you've been getting at. But it's impossible. I'll tell you why—if he was only from a probable world, he couldn't have materialized here."

"But he didn't materialize. That's what he said. That's why he could slip out of our irons. He was only a reflection of—and this is his own phrase—of a moon-ray time reflector machine, and that we had to accept the illusion mentally before it would even exist as much as it did. Professor—"

"Impossible. You've forgotten the book he left. That was material."

"But, sir"—Clair had a hopeless feeling—"he said he had that printed under great difficulties in Hitlerstadt."

"Spirit"—the professor's voice was a remote, husky thing, and it was all too obvious that his mind had gyrated back to an earlier theme—"that's it, spirit like ours cannot die . . . proud that I personally took a bullet without flinching, and after all my fears, too . . . proud—"

He crumpled like a house of cards; and Clair, who had seen death too often to doubt its presence now, climbed over the contorted body in the aisle. He was shaking a little, but his mind was quite clear. Whatever hope there might have been of some mysterious superman coming to the rescue from a world that had yet to prove its right to exist—that hope was gone now.

The only man who knew enough to fill in the all-necessary details of identity was dead, and that meant—

The time had come to fight.

The two men in the cockpit snarled at him like beasts as he entered. Clair saw, from narrowing eyes, that Wilson's right arm hung, a limp, tattered, bloody object at his side. Major Gray was at the port gun, hugging it to his shoulder. Both men flashed him the desperate expressions of human beings determinedly facing a hopeless martyrdom. It was Wilson who raged, "Where in hell do you think you've been, you damned—"

There was, Clair recognized in a biting self-condemnation, justice behind those lashing words. But they were born of maddening pain and served no useful purpose. He knew exactly what to do, what to say; his answer grew *alive* out of events.

"Silence!" He flared the words, because only anger could penetrate here. He sneered, "So you've given up in your hearts, both of you. Think we're licked, eh? Going to go on shooting to the last, but deep in your minds you know it's all hopeless. What can a transport do against fighter planes?

"Shut up!" He snapped the words at Major Gray, whose lips were parting for speech. "I know exactly what you're thinking, but I've just seen a man die who knew how, and if anybody in this cockpit disgraces him, I'll take that person's body and throw it out of the ship. Only men are going to have the honor of going down with this plane."

Before that blazing tirade, the two men, Wilson and the major, exchanged one amazed glance. Gray shrugged his stocky shoulders with

the unmistakable gesture of a man who recognized stark insanity when he saw it.

Clair didn't feel mad. His whole body was aglow with life that quivered like an itching finger on a hair trigger. Never had he been more alert, more conscious of the utter joy of being.

He saw the torpedo-shape silhouette for an instant against the moon, and as the Messerschmitt dived toward them in a long, slanting curve, he crouched over the starboard gun, his mind rock-steady, his whole body intent on aiming.

After a moment he compressed the trigger gently and held it back.

It took a moment, then, for his eyes to recover from the blinding light that ballooned into incandescence where the Hun ship had been.

A shrill yell sounded from Wilson: "Good boy! He blew up!"

The remote thought came to Clair that men in crises were chameleons in their emotions. His navigator, who had hated with violence, now praised in a storm of approval.

That thought passed because—he noticed the oddness with a start—there was a difference in the feel of the gun. It was bulkier. But it felt strangely, immensely lighter, immeasurably easier to handle.

But there was something else, a mind-soaring difference: It had glowed green against the half light of the early morning sky; the whole shiny barrel had tinted a pale, iridescent green.

And the funniest part of all was that he had not the slightest doubt of what had happened:

He was firing a ray of intolerable energy.

As he crouched, he was conscious for the first time of the quiet confidence that was in him, the certainties. Unlike anything he had ever known, a sense of destiny.

He waited for the next attack from the unsuspecting enemy, and became aware of another unusualness.

It required a moment to understand what it was: silence!

Clair frowned; and then again he nodded to himself in perfect comprehension. There was no roar of engines. Which was utterly natural: the spaceship that had been NA-7044 wouldn't be using gasoline engines.

It glided on with a glasslike smoothness, a superb armored creature of deep space, idling along with an impregnable casualness.

Clair stood up and slipped into the seat before the duplicate controls.

"I'll take over," he said very gently to Wilson. "You get to the medicine kit and do something for that arm. We'll land in a few minutes."

As he finished speaking his eyes searched the controls, and he smiled with a sudden, heart-quickening glee. The controls, though they were almost the same, were a shade different. The difference between life and death.

The accelerator was like some supersensitive pressure gauge; it reacted to the barest touch. With boldness Clair pressed it hard—and reeled from a moment of ultraspeed. He saw the great, familiar sweep of England's shore.

They came down with scarcely a jar. The crescent moon was a pale shadow in the middle-western sky as Clair stepped to the ground beside Colonel Ingraham.

The colonel swelled a little. "We certainly made it hot for those Boches. I blew two of them up myself. Must have set off their bomb nests."

For an instant, the officer's utter obliviousness to what had really happened was startling. But actually, Clair thought finally, it explained something that had been puzzling:

The superman had been able to materialize because Professor Capper *had* identified his origin, but, more than that, because the scientist had, in his superb death, provided an intense source of nervous exaltation—the purest of energies.

Enough energy around which to project not only a dynamic will but a concrete spaceship.

Why was the spaceship still here? That had been the puzzling thing until Colonel Ingraham spoke, and which now was as clear as light: The people of freedom's great future, the only world now, were not simply trusting to the fact that a flight which had once failed had, by their intervention, succeeded.

Men were too obstinate, too blind, too practical; so—

The superman that had been Squadron Leader Ernest William Clair smiled a secret smile. He was here to see that a world would be born—properly.

Lewis Padgett

ENDOWMENT POLICY

This story is included because it handles so well the oldest motive for time travel from the future to the present or from the present to the past: the desire to profit by knowledge gained from knowing what "tomorrow" brings. We won't tell you here what eventuates from the paradox, but will only say that it will please you or not, depending on whether you are a believer in predestination or in free will.

WHEN Denny Holt checked in at the telephone box, there was a call for him. Denny wasn't enthusiastic. On a rainy night like this it was easy to pick up fares, and now he'd have to edge his cab uptown to Columbus Circle.

"Nuts," he said into the mouthpiece. "Why me? Send one of the other boys; the guy won't know the difference. I'm way down in the Village."

"He wants you, Holt. Asked for you by name and number. Probably a friend of yours. He'll be at the monument—black overcoat and a cane."

"Who is he?"

"How should I know? He didn't say. Now get going."

Holt disconsolately hung up and went back to his cab. Water trickled from the visor of his cap; rain streaked the windshield. Through the dimout he could see faintly lighted doorways and hear jukebox music. It was a good night to be indoors. Holt considered the advisability of dropping into the Cellar for a quick rye. Oh, well. He meshed the gears and headed up Greenwich Avenue, feeling low.

Pedestrians were difficult to avoid these days; New Yorkers never paid any attention to traffic signals anyway, and the dimout made the streets dark, shadowy canyons. Holt drove uptown, ignoring cries of "Taxi." The street was wet and slippery. His tires weren't too good, either.

The damp cold seeped into Holt's bones. The rattling in the engine wasn't comforting. Some time soon the old bus would break

down completely. After that—well, it was easy to get jobs, but Holt had an aversion to hard work. Defense factories—*hm-m-m-m.*

Brooding, he swung slowly around the traffic circle at Columbus, keeping an eye open for his fare. There he was—the only figure standing motionless in the rain. Other pedestrians were scuttling across the street in a hurry, dodging the trolleys and automobiles.

Holt pulled in and opened the door. The man came forward. He had a cane but no umbrella, and water glistened on his dark overcoat. A shapeless slouch hat shielded his head, and keen dark eyes peered sharply at Holt.

The man was old—rather surprisingly old. His features were obscured by wrinkles and folds of sagging, tallowy skin.

"Dennis Holt?" he asked harshly.

"That's me, buddy. Hop in and dry off."

The old man complied. Holt said, "Where to?"

"Eh? Go through the park."

"Up to Harlem?"

"Why—yes, yes."

Shrugging, Holt turned the taxicab into Central Park. A screwball. And nobody he'd ever seen before. In the rear mirror he stole a glance at his fare. The man was intently examining Holt's photograph and number on the card. Apparently satisfied, he leaned back and took a copy of the *Times* from his pocket.

"Want the light, mister?" Holt asked.

"The light? Yes, thank you." But he did not use it for long. A glance at the paper satisfied him, and the man settled back, switched off the panel lamp, and studied his wrist watch.

"What time is it?" he inquired.

"Seven, about."

"Seven. And this is January 10, 1943."

Holt didn't answer. His fare turned and peered out of the rear window. He kept doing that. After a time he leaned forward and spoke to Holt again.

"Would you like to earn a thousand dollars?"

"Are you joking?"

"This is no joke," the man said, and Holt realized abruptly that his accent was odd—a soft slurring of consonants, as in Castilian Spanish. "I have the money—your current currency. There is some danger involved, so I will not be overpaying you."

Holt kept his eyes straight ahead. "Yeah?"

"I need a bodyguard, that is all. Some men are trying to abduct or even kill me."

"Count me out," Holt said. "I'll drive you to the police station. That's what you need, mister."

Something fell softly on the front seat. Looking down, Holt felt his back tighten. Driving with one hand, he picked up the bundle of banknotes and thumbed through them. A thousand bucks—one grand.

They smelled musty.

The old man said, "Believe me, Denny, it is your help I need. I can't tell you the story—you'd think me insane—but I'll pay you that amount for your services tonight."

"Including murder?" Holt hazarded. "Where do you get off calling me Denny? I never saw you before in my life."

"I have investigated you—I know a great deal about you. That's why I chose you for this task. And nothing illegal is involved. If you have reason to think differently, you are free to withdraw at any time, keeping the money."

Holt thought that over. It sounded fishy but enticing. Anyhow, it gave him an out. And a thousand bucks—

"Well, spill it. What am I supposed to do?"

The old man said, "I am trying to evade certain enemies of mine. I need your help for that. You are young and strong."

"Somebody's trying to rub you out?"

"Rub me . . . oh. I don't think it will come to that. Murder is frowned upon, except as a last resort. But they have followed me here; I saw them. I believe I shook them off my trail. No cabs are following us—"

"Wrong," Holt said.

There was a silence. The old man looked out the rear window again.

Holt grinned crookedly. "If you're trying to duck, Central Park isn't the place. I can lose your friends in traffic easier. O.K., mister, I'm taking the job. But I got the privilege of stepping out if I don't like the smell."

"Very well, Denny."

Holt cut left at the level of Seventy-second. "You know me, but I don't know you. What's the angle, checking up on me? You a detective?"

"No. My name's Smith."

"Naturally."

"And you—Denny—are twenty years old, and unavailable for military duty in this war because of cardiac trouble."

Holt grunted. "What about it?"

"I do not want you to drop dead."

"I won't. My heart's O.K. for most things. The medical examiner just didn't think so."

Smith nodded. "I know that. Now, Denny—"

"Well?"

"We must be sure we aren't followed."

Holt said slowly, "Suppose I stopped at F.B.I. headquarters? They don't like spies."

"As you like. I can prove to them I am not an enemy agent. My business has nothing to do with this war, Denny. I merely wish to prevent a crime. Unless I can stop it, a house will be burned tonight and a valuable formula destroyed."

"That's a job for the fire department."

"You and I are the only ones who can perform this task. I can't tell you why. A thousand dollars, remember."

Holt was remembering. A thousand dollars meant a lot to him at the moment. He had never had that much money in his life. It meant a stake; capital on which to build. He hadn't had a real education. Until now, he'd figured he'd continue in a dull, plodding job forever. But with a stake—well, he had ideas. These were boom times. He could go in business for himself; that was the way to make dough. One grand. Yeah. It might mean a future.

He emerged from the park at Seventy-second Street and turned south on Central Park West. From the corner of his eye saw another taxi swing toward him. It was trying to pocket his cab. Holt heard his passenger gasp and cry something. He jammed on the brakes, saw the other car go by, and swung the steering wheel hard, pushing his foot down on the accelerator. He made a U-turn, fast, and was headed north.

"Take it easy," he said to Smith.

There had been four men in the other taxicab; he had got only a brief glimpse. They were clean-shaven and wore dark clothes. They might have been holding weapons; Holt couldn't be certain of that. They were swinging around, too, now, having difficulties with the traffic but intent on pursuit.

At the first convenient street Holt turned left, crossed Broadway, took the cloverleaf into the Henry Hudson Parkway, and then, instead of heading south on the drive, made a complete circle and retraced his route as far as West End Avenue. He went south on West End, cutting across to Eighth Avenue presently. There was more traffic now. The following cab wasn't visible.

"What now?" he asked Smith.

"I . . . I don't know. We must be sure we're not followed."

"O.K.," Holt said. "They'll be cruising around looking for us. We'd better get off the street. I'll show you." He turned into a parking garage, got a ticket, and hurried Smith out of the cab. "We kill time now, till it's safe to start again."

"Where—"

"What about a quiet bar? I could stand a drink. It's a lousy night."

Smith seemed to have put himself completely in Holt's hands. They turned into Forty-second Street, with its dimly lit honky-tonks, burlesque shows, dark theater marquees, and penny arcades. Holt shouldered his way through the crowd, dragging Smith with him. They went through swinging doors into a gin mill, but it wasn't especially quiet. A jukebox was going full blast in a corner.

An unoccupied booth near the back attracted Holt. Seated there, he signaled the waiter and demanded a rye. Smith, after hesitating, took the same.

"I know this place," Holt said. "There's a back door. If we're traced, we can go out fast."

Smith shivered.

"Forget it," Holt comforted. He exhibited a set of brass knuckles. "I carry these with me, just in case. So relax. Here's our liquor." He downed the rye at a gulp and asked for another. Since Smith made no attempt to pay, Holt did. He could afford it, with a thousand bucks in his pocket.

Now, shielding the bills with his body, he took them out for a closer examination. They looked all right. They weren't counterfeit; the serial numbers were O.K.; and they had the same odd musty smell Holt had noticed before.

"You must have been hoarding these," he hazarded.

Smith said absently, "They've been on exhibit for sixty years—" He caught himself and drank rye.

Holt scowled. These weren't the old-fashioned large-sized bills. Sixty

years, nuts! Not but what Smith looked that old; his wrinkled, sexless face might have been that of a nonagenarian. Holt wondered what the guy had looked like when he was young. When would that have been? During the Civil War, most likely!

He stowed the money away again, conscious of a glow of pleasure that wasn't due entirely to the liquor. This was the beginning for Denny Holt. With a thousand dollars he'd buy in somewhere and go to town. No more cabbing, that was certain.

On the postage-stamp floor dancers swayed and jitterbugged. The din was constant, loud conversation from the bar vying with the juke-box music. Holt, with a paper napkin, idly swabbed a beer stain on the table before him.

"You wouldn't like to tell me what this is all about, would you?" he said finally.

Smith's incredibly old face might have held some expression; it was difficult to tell. "I can't, Denny. You wouldn't believe me. What time is it now?"

"Nearly eight."

"Eastern Standard Time, old reckoning—and January tenth. We must be at our destination before eleven."

"Where's that?"

Smith took out a map, unfolded it, and gave an address in Brooklyn. Holt located it.

"Near the beach. Pretty lonely place, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I've never been there."

"What's going to happen at eleven?"

Smith shook his head but did not answer directly. He unfolded a paper napkin.

"Do you have a stylo?"

Holt hesitated and then extended a pack of cigarettes.

"No, a . . . a pencil. Thank you. I want you to study this plan, Denny. It's the ground floor of the house we're going to in Brooklyn. Keaton's laboratory is in the basement."

"Keaton?"

"Yes," Smith said, after a pause. "He's a physicist. He's working on a rather important invention. It's supposed to be a secret."

"O.K. What now?"

Smith sketched hastily. "There should be spacious grounds around the house, which has three stories. Here's the library. You can get into

it by these windows, and the safe should be beneath a curtain about—here." The pencil point stabbed down.

Holt's brows drew together. "I'm starting to smell fish."

"Eh?" Smith's hand clenched nervously. "Wait till I've finished. That safe will be unlocked. In it you will find a brown notebook. I want you to get that notebook—"

"—and send it air mail to Hitler," Holt finished, his mouth twisting in a sneer.

"—and turn it over to the War Department," Smith said imperturbably. "Does that satisfy you?"

"Well—that sounds more like it. But why don't you do the job yourself?"

"I can't," Smith said. "Don't ask me why; I simply can't. My hands are tied." The sharp eyes were glistening. "That notebook, Denny, contains a tremendously important secret."

"Military?"

"It isn't written in code; it's easy to read. And apply. That's the beauty of it. Any man could—"

"You said a guy named Keaton owned that place in Brooklyn. What's happened to him?"

"Nothing," Smith said, "yet." He covered up hastily. "The formula mustn't be lost, that's why we've got to get there just before eleven."

"If it's that important, why don't we go out there now and get the notebook?"

"The formula won't be completed until a few minutes before eleven. Keaton is working out the final stages now."

"It's screwy," Holt complained. He had another rye. "Is this Keaton a Nazi?"

"No."

"Well, isn't he the one who needs a bodyguard, not you?"

Smith shook his head. "It doesn't work out that way, Denny. Believe me, I know what I'm doing. It's vitally, intensely important that you get that formula."

"Hm-m-m."

"There's a danger. My—enemies—may be waiting for us there. But I'll draw them off and give you a chance to enter the house."

"You said they might kill you."

"They might, but I doubt it. Murder is the last recourse, though euthanasia is always available. But I'm not a candidate for that."

Holt didn't try to understand Smith's viewpoint on euthanasia; he decided it was a place name and implied taking a powder.

"For a thousand bucks," he said, "I'll risk my skin."

"How long will it take us to get to Brooklyn?"

"Say an hour, in the dimout." Holt got up quickly. "Come on. Your friends are here."

Panic showed in Smith's dark eyes. He seemed to shrink into the capacious overcoat. "What'll we do?"

"The back way. They haven't seen us yet. If we're separated, go to the garage where I left the cab."

"Y-yes. All right."

They pushed through the dancers and into the kitchen, past that into a bare corridor. Opening a door, Smith came out in an alley. A tall figure loomed before him, nebulous in the dark. Smith gave a shrill, frightened squeak.

"Beat it," Holt ordered. He pushed the old man away. The dark figure made some movement, and Holt struck swiftly at a half-seen jaw. His fist didn't connect. His opponent had shifted rapidly.

Smith was scuttling off, already lost in shadows. The sound of his racing footsteps died.

Holt, his heart pounding reasonlessly, took a step forward. "Get out of my way," he said, so deep in his throat that the words came out as a purring snarl.

"Sorry," his antagonist said. "You mustn't go to Brooklyn tonight."

"Why not?" Holt was listening for sounds that would mean more of the enemy. But as yet he heard nothing, only distant honking of automobile horns and the low mingled tumult from Times Square, a half block away.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

There was the same accent, the same Castilian slurring of consonants that Holt had noticed when Smith spoke. He strained to make out the other man's face. But it was too dark.

Surreptitiously, Holt slipped his hand into his pocket and felt the comforting coldness of the brass knuckles. He said, "If you pull a gun on me—"

"We do not use guns. Listen, Dennis Holt. Keaton's formula must be destroyed with him."

"Why, you—" Holt struck without warning. This time he didn't miss. He felt the brass knuckles hit solidly and then slide, slippery on

bloody, torn flesh. The half-seen figure went down, a shout muffled in his throat. Holt looked around, saw no one, and went at a loping run along the alley. Good enough, so far.

Five minutes later he was at the parking garage. Smith was waiting for him, a withered crow in a huge overcoat. The old man's fingers were tapping nervously on the cane.

"Come on," Holt said. "We'd better move fast now."

"Did you—"

"I knocked him cold. He didn't have a gun—or else he didn't want to use it. Lucky for me."

Smith grimaced. Holt recovered his taxi and maneuvered down the ramp, handling the car gingerly and keeping on the alert. A cab was plenty easy to spot. The dimout helped.

He crept south and east to the Bowery, but at Essex Street, by the subway station, the pursuers caught up. Holt swung into a side street. His left elbow, resting on the window frame, went numb and icy cold.

He steered with his right hand until the feeling wore off. The Williamsburg Bridge took him into Kings, and he dodged and alternately speeded and backtracked until he'd lost the shadows again. That took time. And there was still a long distance to go, by this circuitous route.

Holt, turning right, worked his way south to Prospect Park and then east, toward the lonely beach section between Brighton Beach and Canarsie. Smith, huddled in back, had made no sound.

"So far, so good," Holt said over his shoulder. "My arm's in shape again, anyhow."

"What happened to it?"

"Must have hit my funny bone."

"No," Smith said, "that was a paralyzer. Like this." He exhibited the cane.

Holt didn't get it. He kept driving until they were nearly at their destination. He pulled up around the corner from a liquor store.

"I'm getting a bottle," he said. "It's too cold and rainy without a shot of something to pep me up."

"We haven't time."

"Sure we have."

Smith bit his lip but made no further objection. Holt bought a pint of rye and, back in the cab, took a swig, after offering his fare a drink and getting a shake of the head for answer.

The rye definitely helped. The night was intensely cold and miserable; squalls of rain swept across the street, sluicing down the windshield. The worn wipers didn't help much. The wind screamed like a banshee.

"We're close enough," Smith suggested. "Better stop here. Find a place to hide the taxicab."

"Where? These are all private houses."

"A driveway . . . eh?"

"O.K.," Holt said, and found one shielded by overhanging trees and rank bushes. He turned off lights and motor and got out, hunching his chin down and turning up the collar of his slicker. The rain instantly drenched him. It came down with a steady, torrential pour, pattering noisily, staccato in the puddles. Underfoot was sandy, slippery mud.

"Wait a sec," Holt said, and returned to the cab for his flashlight. "All set. Now what?"

"Keaton's house." Smith was shivering convulsively. "It isn't eleven yet. We'll have to wait."

They waited, concealed in the bushes on Keaton's grounds. The house was a looming shadow against the fluctuating curtain of drenched darkness. A lighted window on the ground floor showed part of what seemed to be a library. The sound of breakers, throbbing heavily, came from their left.

Water trickled down inside Holt's collar. He cursed quietly. He was earning his thousand bucks, all right. But Smith was going through the same discomfort and not complaining about it.

"Isn't it—"

"Sh-h!" Smith warned. "The—others—may be here."

Obediently, Holt lowered his voice. "Then they'll be drowned, too. Are they after the notebook? Why don't they go in and get it?"

Smith bit his nails. "They want it destroyed."

"That's what the guy in the alley said, come to think of it," Holt nodded, startled. "Who are they, anyhow?"

"Never mind. They don't belong here. Do you remember what I told you, Denny?"

"About getting the notebook? What'll I do if the safe isn't open?"

"It will be," Smith said confidently. "Soon, now. Keaton is in his cellar laboratory, finishing his experiment."

Through the lighted window a shadow flickered. Holt leaned for-

ward; he felt Smith go tense as wire beside him. A tiny gasp ripped from the old man's throat.

A man had entered the library. He went to the wall, swung aside a curtain, and stood there, his back to Holt. Presently he stepped back, opening the door of a safe.

"Ready!" Smith said. "This is it! He's writing down the final step of the formula. The explosion will come in a minute now. When it does, Denny, give me a minute to get away and cause a disturbance, if the others are here."

"I don't think they are."

Smith shook his head. "Do as I say. Run for the house and get the notebook."

"Then what?"

"Then get out of here as fast as you can. Don't let them catch you, whatever you do."

"What about you?"

Smith's eyes blazed with intense, violent command, shining out of the windy dark. "Forget me, Denny! I'll be safe."

"You hired me as a bodyguard."

"I'm discharging you, then. This is vitally important, more important than my life. That notebook must be in your hands—"

"For the War Department?"

"For . . . oh, yes. You'll do that, now, Denny?"

Holt hesitated. "If it's that important—"

"It is. It is!"

"O.K., then."

The man in the house was at a desk, writing. Suddenly the window blew out. The sound of the blast was muffled, as though its source was underground, but Holt felt the ground shake beneath him. He saw Keaton spring up, take a half step away, and return, snatching up the notebook. The physicist ran to the wall safe, threw the book into it, swung the door shut, and paused there briefly, his back to Holt. Then he darted out of Holt's range of vision and was gone.

Smith said, his voice coming out in excited spurts, "He didn't have time to lock it. Wait till you hear me, Denny, and then *get that notebook!*"

Holt said "O.K.," but Smith was already gone, running through the bushes. A yell from the house heralded red flames sweeping out a dis-

tant, ground-floor window. Something fell crashingly—masonry, Holt thought.

He heard Smith's voice. He could not see the man in the rain, but there was the noise of a scuffle. Briefly Holt hesitated. Blue pencils of light streaked through the rain, wan and vague in the distance.

He ought to help Smith—

He'd promised, though, and there was the notebook. The pursuers had wanted it destroyed. And now, quite obviously, the house was going up in flames. Of Keaton there was no trace.

He ran for the lighted window. There was plenty of time to get the notebook before the fire became dangerous.

From the corner of his eye he saw a dark figure cutting in toward him. Holt slipped on his brass knuckles. If the guy had a gun it would be unfortunate; otherwise, fair enough.

The man—the same one Holt had encountered in the Forty-second Street alley—raised a cane and aimed it. A wan blue pencil of light streaked out. Holt felt his legs go dead and crashed down heavily.

The other man kept running. Holt, struggling to his feet, threw himself desperately forward. No use.

The flames were brightening the night now. The tall, dark figure loomed for an instant against the library window; then the man had clambered over the sill. Holt, his legs stiff, managed to keep his balance and lurch forward. It was agony: like pins and needles a thousand times intensified.

He made it to the window, and, clinging to the sill, stared into the room. His opponent was busy at the safe. Holt swung himself through the window and hobbled toward the man.

His brass-knuckled fist was ready.

The unknown sprang lightly away, swinging his cane. Dried blood stained his chin.

"I've locked the safe," he said. "Better get out of here before the fire catches you, Denny."

Holt mouthed a curse. He tried to reach the man but could not. Before he had covered more than two halting steps, the tall figure was gone, springing lightly out through the window and racing away into the rain.

Holt turned to the safe. He could hear the crackling of flames. Smoke was pouring through a doorway on his left.

He tested the safe; it was locked. He didn't know the combination —so he couldn't open it.

But Holt tried. He searched the desk, hoping Keaton might have scribbled the key on a paper somewhere. He fought his way to the laboratory steps and stood looking down into the inferno of the cellar, where Keaton's burning, motionless body lay. Yes, Holt tried. And he failed.

Finally the heat drove him from the house. Fire trucks were screaming closer. There was no sign of Smith or anyone else.

Holt stayed, amid the crowds, to search, but Smith and his trackers had disappeared as though they had vanished into thin air.

"We caught him, Administrator," said the tall man with the dried blood on his chin. "I came here directly on our return to inform you."

The administrator blew out his breath in a sigh of deep relief.

"Any trouble, Jorus?"

"Not to speak of."

"Well, bring him in," the administrator said. "I suppose we'd better get this over with."

Smith entered the office. His heavy overcoat looked incongruous against the celoflex garments of the others.

He kept his eyes cast down.

The administrator picked up a memoroll and read: "Sol 21, in the year of our Lord 2016. Subject: interference with probability factors. The accused has been detected in the act of attempting to tamper with the current probability-present by altering the past, thus creating a variable alternative present. Use of time machines is forbidden except by authorized officials. Accused will answer."

Smith mumbled, "I wasn't trying to change things, Administrator—"

Jorus looked up and said, "Objection. Certain key time-place periods are forbidden. Brooklyn, especially the area about Keaton's house, in the time near eleven P. M., January 10, 1943, is absolutely forbidden to time travelers. The prisoner knows why."

"I knew nothing about it, Ser Jorus. You must believe me."

Jorus went on relentlessly, "Administrator, here are the facts. The accused, having stolen a time traveler, set the controls manually for a forbidden space-time sector. Such sectors are restricted, as you know, because they are keys to the future; interference with such key spots will automatically alter the future and create a different line of proba-

bility. Keaton, in 1943, in his cellar laboratory, succeeded in working out the formula for what we know now as M-Power. He hurried upstairs, opened his safe, and noted down the formula in his book, in such a form that it could very easily have been deciphered and applied even by a layman. At that time there was an explosion in Keaton's laboratory and he replaced the notebook in the safe and went downstairs, neglecting, however, to relock the safe. Keaton was killed; he had not known the necessity of keeping M-Power away from radium, and the atomic synthesis caused the explosion. The subsequent fire destroyed Keaton's notebook, even though it had been within the safe. It was charred into illegibility, nor was its value suspected. Not until the first year of the twenty-first century was M-Power rediscovered."

Smith said, "I didn't know all that, Ser Jorus."

"You are lying. Our organization does not make mistakes. You found a key spot in the past and decided to change it, thus altering our present. Had you succeeded, Dennis Holt of 1943 would have taken Keaton's notebook out of the burning house and read it. His curiosity would have made him open the notebook. He would have found the key to M-Power. And, because of the very nature of M-Power, Dennis Holt would have become the most powerful man in his world time. According to the variant probability line you were aiming at, Dennis Holt, had he got that notebook, would have been dictator of the world now. This world, as we know it, would not exist, though its equivalent would—a brutal, ruthless civilization ruled by an autocratic Dennis Holt, the sole possessor of M-Power. In striving for that end, the prisoner has committed a serious crime."

Smith lifted his head. "I demand euthanasia," he said. "If you want to blame me for trying to get out of this damned routine life of mine, very well. I never had a chance, that's all."

The administrator raised his eyebrows. "Your record shows you have had many chances. You are incapable of succeeding through your own abilities; you are in the only job you can do well. But your crime is, as Jorus says, serious. You have tried to create a new probability present, destroying this one by tampering with a key spot in the past. And, had you succeeded, Dennis Holt would now be dictator of a race of slaves. Euthanasia is no longer your privilege; your crime is too serious. You must continue to live, at your appointed task, until the day of your natural death."

Smith choked. "It was *his* fault—if he'd got that notebook in time—"

Jorus looked quizzical. "*His?* Dennis Holt, at the age of twenty, in 1943 . . . his fault? No, it is yours, I think—for trying to change your past and your present."

The administrator said, "Sentence has been passed. It is ended."

And Dennis Holt, at the age of ninety-three, in the year of our Lord 2016, turned obediently and went slowly back to his job, the same one he would fill now until he died.

And Dennis Holt, at the age of twenty, in the year of our Lord 1943, drove his taxi home from Brooklyn, wondering what it had all been about. The veils of rain swept slanting across the windshield. Denny took another drink out of the bottle and felt the rye steal comfortingly through his body.

What had it all been about?

Banknotes rustled crisply in his pocket. Denny grinned. A thousand smackeroos! His stake. His capital. With that, now, he could do plenty —and he would, too. All a guy needed was a little ready money, and he could go places.

"You bet!" Dennis Holt said emphatically. "I'm not going to hold down the same dull job all my life. Not with a thousand bucks—not me!"

Raymond F. Jones

PETE CAN FIX IT

Of course, there is always the possibility of free will, even though the previous story seemed to deny it. Maybe a man could change the course of history. Perhaps someone could come back from an evil future with knowledge of the way to avoid that particular evil, and see if he could persuade the people of today to use the knowledge.

If so, this means that there must be a multiplicity of worlds, some good and some bad, and that every time a major decision is made at least two new worlds are created—one in which the decision was positive and the other in which it was negative. There is also, of course, the possibility that a third world might exist in which need for a decision would not even arise. The tale, therefore, is an acceptable bridge to Part Two of this book, dealing with alternate worlds.

IT WAS just outside Wickenburg, Arizona, that Ralph Grandin noticed the first of the signs. In the faint desert dawn he nodded toward it with a laugh. Marcia, his wife, followed his glance with her eyes.

"Pete Can Fix It!" she read aloud. "We'd better find Pete quick, then, before the car finishes its collapse."

"It would take more than a guy named Pete to doctor our galloping Susie." He patted the steering wheel of their '38 Chevvy fondly as it rattled along the highway at a mean 45 m.p.h.

Thirteen-year-old Jack, their son, looked disdainfully from the back seat. Whatever the skills of the unknown Pete, Jack was certain that *he* could do a job ten times better on anything mechanical.

Wickenburg faded quickly out of sight, and the hush of the desert was broken only by the car's dissonant noises. This was the summer of 1946, the first vacation in five years for Professor Grandin and his family. Grandin had turned down an opportunity to be in on the Bikini farce. His work on radiation measurements would profit more by a good vacation. Besides, he would be seeing Mason at the university in Los Angeles to show him the new detector he had developed. He needed a good chin fest with somebody like Mason, and the detector was the best excuse in the world.

"Look. Pete's with us again." Marcia pointed to the desert landscape

on her side of the road. Another of the weatherbeaten signs declared in bold black and white: "Pete Can Fix It."

"Remember that new Burma Shave we saw in Nebraska?" said Jack.

This was swell, thought Grandin. Just like the old times, it seemed. But he knew it wasn't. Never would be again. Funny how people thought you could go back to something you'd had before, when that something was so rotten it had collapsed of its own weight.

Bikini is a bust, he thought, and too many of the atom boys have turned to collecting butterfly wings. There was no going back to the past, but if there were only some way out of the bumbling, nerve-shattering idiocy of the present—

Pete Can Fix It!

The irrefutable assertion seemed to lurch at them out of the desert wastes. Grandin found himself welcoming the signs. There was no indication as to where this multidexterous Pete was located or what he could fix, but the calm assertion that Pete could fix it was like some familiar landmark in a barren, fearful wasteland.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could turn the whole world over to Pete?" Marcia suggested whimsically. "If we could just hand him the whole mess and say, 'Here you are, Bud. Send the bill next month.'"

"That's the trouble now," said Grandin. "There've been too many Petes who thought they could fix it—and we're paying the bills."

"He's probably a hick in a one-horse garage by the side of the road out in the sticks," said Jack disparagingly.

Grandin chuckled tolerantly. Jack would no doubt be the match of a dozen Petes when he grew up. The boy's intuition for mechanical and electrical tinkering was little short of genius. He had the run of the laboratories over which Grandin presided, and spoke of deuterons and neutrons with the same familiarity that others of his generation spoke of baseballs and Boy Scout hikes.

Jack wasn't a prodigy—Grandin and Marcia hoped. But he was a smart kid and might grow up to be a darned useful citizen if he could be steered right—a problem that absorbed Grandin's interest equally with atomic bombs.

Over the magic and the mystery of the desert the cryptic signs led them, and, all at once, twenty miles out of Quartzsite, they saw it—a ramshackle garage with a single gas pump.

It bore a giant inscription that covered an entire wall: Pete's. In

small letters was the final, uncompromising declaration: Pete Can Fix It. It was small and less bold than it had been on the desert signs, as if ashamed of the reality which was shabby in the face of the bold proclamations.

"I was right!" Jack exclaimed jubilantly. "I'll bet he doesn't know a timing gear from a cam shaft. Let's stop for gas and look around, Pop."

"O.K.," Grandin laughed. But somehow he felt a sense of unnamable loss, a nostalgic disappointment as if some childhood dream had vanished when the battered building came into view.

A few chickens cackled furiously out of sight as Grandin drove up. He turned off the motor, and the swelling silence of the desert poured over them. It shattered suddenly before the pounding of metal that sounded from within the dismal garage.

"Hey, somebody's here, all right," said Jack. "Look at that car that he's working on—!"

Grandin and Marcia peered into the dark cavern from whence the sound came. They glimpsed the flicker of a mechanic's lamp and the shining outlines of a new model Cadillac. Something of Grandin's disappointment was dispelled.

"At least this Pete gets the top-drawer customers out here," he said with a laugh.

A figure crystallized from the dimness and shambled toward them. He moved as if with extreme effort, slowly, like some unknown denizen of that dark cavern in which he lived and worked.

In the sunlight he was a man of uncertain twenty-five to thirty-five. He moved stiffly, as if from painfully arthritic joints. And even beneath the layer of grease and grime that incrusted him they could see the splotched skin, great discolorations that seemed to speak of some unwholesomeness beyond endurance.

He approached the car. "How many?" he said.

Grandin and Marcia let their gaze move toward the mechanic's eyes, and with the sudden glimpse into the depths of that intense blue there came an almost tangible shock. There was something in the man's face, a searching, frantically inquiring something that was ravenous, frightening.

Grandin swallowed. "Fill the tank," he said.

He got out to unlock the gas cap, almost consciously avoiding the eyes of the man.

"You're Pete?" he asked.

The mechanic nodded, inserting the nozzle into the tank.

"We saw your signs all the way from Wickenburg. We wondered just where you were. Seems you have a rather out-of-the-way location for a garage."

"Sometimes cars pick out-of-the-way places to break down," said Pete.

His glance darted about—from the pump indicator to the tank to the interior of the car and back to Grandin's face. "Mind," he said hesitantly, "if I ask your name?"

"Well—no, it's Grandin. Ralph Grandin."

"Grandin—" Pete seemed to test the name with his tongue as if searching for some old, forgotten memory. Then he shook his head faintly as he replaced the gas hose and locked the tank.

"I thought maybe I had seen you before," he said. "Your little boy —he's about twelve, isn't he?"

"Jack just turned thirteen. Well, thanks, what do I owe you?"

Pete remained motionless, staring intently at Jack as if trying by the very power of will to shape his image in the form of something familiar but forgotten.

"I traveled along this road when I was a little boy," said Pete slowly, his eyes far away. "My mother and father took me somewhere and we came this way—when I was just about the age of your boy."

Grandin held out a ten-dollar bill. Pete looked down at it as if memory and consciousness were struggling back from some far vista that ordinary men could not see. "When I was a little boy—" he said absently. "But I don't know where we were going—"

Then he seemed to become aware of Grandin and the money. "Let me check your oil. Bad to let it get low out in this hot country."

"Hurry, Ralph," said Marcia. "It's hot in the car."

"Better get out and have a cold drink. I'll see if he has some Cokes in the box over here," said Grandin.

He started toward the store half of the place, where aspirin and piston rings were stacked side by side on the shelves. Jack darted out of the car and leaned over the fender while Pete checked the oil. In vain Marcia tried to motion her son back from getting close to Pete's loathsomeness.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Jack's voice suddenly pierced the still,

desert air. "Hey, Pop. This guy doesn't know a distributor from an oil stick!"

Grandin turned, after closing the lid of the empty soft-drink cooler. "What's the trouble?"

He came up as Pete extracted one of the points from the distributor and held it up. "This won't get you much farther, mister. It's about ready to burn right out of the spring arm."

Grandin squinted at the blackened metal disk which was truly almost nonexistent. "Guess they do need replacing, all right."

"Seventy-five cents, installed," said Pete with eagerness that was somehow repulsive, as if he were a crow snatching at crumbs from a rich man's table.

"All right. Put in some new ones."

Pete moved away with the jerkiness that betokened intense pain.

Jack whispered hoarsely, "Pop, he didn't get that burned-out point from our distributor. He had it already in his hand and palmed ours! I saw him."

Grandin looked down at Jack's earnest, excited face. He grinned uncertainly. "That's silly. You must be mistaken, Jack. What would he do a thing like that for?"

"I'll bet a guy in a run-down shack like this would do anything for a six-bit sale."

"Well, it won't hurt us to give it to him, then. The poor devil must just about starve to death out here, anyway. And he looks terribly sick, besides."

At that moment another figure emerged from the darkness of the garage. A portly man in an expensive suit, and smoking a black cigar, stepped into the bright sunlight. He ambled toward the car as if in resigned disgust.

"Hello," he said. "I see the old coot stuck you for something, too."

"He's just changing our points," Grandin said. He didn't advance the conversation any further, but the man remained.

"That's what I meant. I've been here for three hours trying to get a generator repaired. Not many people stop, but since I've been here that old guy has managed to sell everyone of them some parts or service. He must be a wizard the way he can put his finger right on a car's pending trouble. If he didn't look like a zombie and were in a good location, he ought to be able to clean up in this racket."

Grandin made no reply.

The man moved back toward the dimness of the garage where his Cadillac waited.

Pete returned and installed and adjusted the new points. He replaced the condenser as well, and charged nothing extra.

He closed the hood with a snap. "You'll get there all right now," he said with a wry smile, "and if anybody asks about me, just tell 'em Pete can fix it!"

The shabby garage and the queer mechanic with the loathsome appearance, and the beefy man with the Cadillac disappeared from view as the Chevvy moved on. Jack and Marcia settled back in their seats, and conversation lagged as the miles of highway flowed beneath their wheels.

"We can have lunch in Blythe," said Grandin at last.

"His eyes—" said Marcia. "I can never forget those eyes. They made me think I'd known him somewhere before—"

"I know what you mean," Grandin replied slowly. "I sort of felt the same way. Strange we should both feel the same."

"I hope we never see the dope again," said Jack. "He gave me the willies. And chiseling for six bits—!"

The desert sky turned copper in the afternoon sun, and a pall of heat and depression overshadowed their vacation spirits. They wished for the sight of the ocean and the flashing whitecaps of cool waves.

They were just outside Indio when the powerful Cadillac they had seen at Pete's roared by at eighty miles an hour. The lone driver hugged the wheel intently, his ever-present cigar tight between his lips.

"He'll burn out more than a generator if he keeps that new buggy going at that rate," said Jack scornfully. "That guys like him should have what it takes to get new cars—!"

Ralph Grandin was thinking along the same lines, but not aloud. He was thinking of the past four years and the things he'd done with his life. His part had been small, but nevertheless he had contributed to the weapon that seemed destined to wipe out the world—and he felt his life had been wasted. What to do with the rest of it, he wondered. He felt an almost spiritual, psychic need to devote it to atonement for helping to bring prematurely to mankind the Promethean atomic fires that threatened to burn down the earth.

He was becoming mystical, Grandin thought in self-recrimination, but that didn't ease the gnawing urge to fill his life with some grand ideal, some possessing goal to fill his emptiness.

He didn't know when the change came. It was midafternoon and they were a few miles past Pomona when he first noticed it. The sky that had been copper over the desert became more glaring and golden. An eternal pall of dust seemed to fill the air.

There came a sudden, sharp, wrenching jar that made him think the steering gear had snapped. But in an instant he regained control of the car. He glanced in the mirror to see what unseen bump in the road had caused the jolt.

Marcia's face was a little white with the shock of it. "What in the world did you hit?"

"Nothing. Something must be wrong with the car. But it seems to be O.K. now."

He drove on, alert for trouble, but nothing else occurred. Gradually his tension eased and he stepped harder on the gas.

"I wonder where all the traffic went," Jack remarked. "It looked like every man and his dog was on the road a little while ago."

Grandin noted that he had been unconsciously aware of the same fact. The road did seem deserted all of a sudden, but more than that, it was the *houses* at the occasional crossroads that looked deserted and in bad repair. The road itself seemed veiled in drifted sand and dust in which few tire marks showed. It was as if they had suddenly driven into a new and strange world—a dead world.

"Ralph, we must have gotten onto the wrong road somehow," said Marcia. "Maybe there's a new cutoff and we just kept on the old road. Hadn't we better go back?"

"No. There are the highway markers up ahead. Anyway, we'll soon be in Los Angeles."

Grandin didn't believe his own assurances. His puzzlement grew as the deathliness of the scene increased. Then, at West Covina, they began to see the first of the bombed-out buildings.

Marcia gave a faint, shrill cry. "Ralph! This place looks like there's been an explosion!"

There was debris now even in the four-lane superhighway on which they rode. Grandin slowed and twisted the wheel to avoid the rubble.

"We should have heard any blast big enough to do all this," said Jack. "When do you think it happened?"

"I don't know. We saw newspapers this morning. There was nothing about it then."

Past West Covina, the evidence of destruction didn't diminish. At every cluster of homes and buildings it increased. And at last, when they were in a position to glimpse the full skyline of Los Angeles, they stopped in horror. As far as their eyes could see there were only skeletons of buildings, vast heaps of rubble and debris—and nowhere any life.

"Ralph—!" Marcia's hand gripped his arm painfully and her voice was shrill with fear.

"It looks like the pictures of an atomic bombing!" Jack exclaimed. "But it couldn't be. We'd have heard it."

Instinctively, their eyes sought the sky, but not even a bird soared overhead.

"Let's go on a little farther," said Grandin soberly.

"I'm afraid of it," whispered Marcia. "Let's not get any closer. Let's go back to . . . to some place that's alive and find out what's happened here."

"Just a little farther, then we'll go back. I want to make sure—"

Grandin opened the trunk of the car and removed the carefully packed detector that he had brought to show Mason. He set it up for operation on the front seat between Marcia and himself. Slowly he started down the half-choked highway.

There was scarcely any need of going farther. On its most sensitive setting the needle of the indicator was pounding the pin, indicating the intense radioactivity of the atmosphere about them.

"An atomic bomb," said Grandin dully. "More likely a dozen of them to give this radioactivity. And we didn't even think anyone else knew how to make a bomb—!"

"But we didn't hear or see a thing!" Jack protested.

"I know— That's what I can't understand."

"Could it have been that bump we couldn't figure out?" Marcia said. "That felt almost as if we had been picked up and twisted around and set down again."

"I don't know . . . I just don't know," said Grandin. "All I know is that it has happened. Whatever else it means, the same thing must have happened to every other large city in America. And we weren't ready for it. This is A.D. 1946, the New Stone Age."

They stopped and got out of the car and stood close together silently

viewing the vast wreckage of the city. Grandin tried to pick out the bomb craters. He thought he could see four different ones, but it was hard to be sure.

He knew that their minds were too small to comprehend the immensity of the disaster in all its panoramic horror. But, fragment by fragment, like spewing bits of the bombs themselves, it penetrated their comprehension, each piece leaving its own aura of fear and desperation which combined with the others to form a swelling bubble of panic like a ball of incandescent gas about to explode within them. Through the days and nights to come the bubble would grow until at last they came to know that their world and all its connotations were dead, and they would have to live with that knowledge to the end of their bitter, miserable lives.

Marcia began to weep softly. Jack clung to Grandin's hand with young fingers of steel. "What do we do now?" He asked with restrained emotion.

"Away from the cities," said Grandin slowly. "There may be some semblance of technology surviving. It's doubtful. Chaos, invasion, formation of warring tribes of our own people—until we find out what's happening, we'd better isolate ourselves. We'll try to find food and gas and head inland toward the mountains of central Arizona. It's our best hope for survival."

"Ralph! There's a car coming!" Marcia pointed down the highway.

For a moment they watched as if the appearance of a moving object were some strange miracle in this land of death.

"It's the Cadillac we saw at Pete's," said Jack.

The reckless driver weaved through the rubble and skidded to a stop in a cloud of dust before them. Abruptly he was out and moving toward them on foot. Marcia screamed at the sight of the gun in his hand.

"What do you—?" Grandin began.

"Things have changed." The man's dead cigar shifted in his mouth. "You can see that. In case you don't know it, we're probably the only ones left alive in all of Los Angeles. I'm heading north, but there's no way through the city. I've got to go around. Lucky I came this way. I'm going to need all the gas I can get. Put yours in my tank and be quick about it."

"But we can all go together!" said Grandin.

"Nuts. We're back to the level of every man for himself, folks. Civili-

zation and that 'Do unto others—' stuff is as dead as the million corpses all around us. Get busy, fella! I've never killed a man before, but I've an idea I'll have plenty of it to do to keep myself alive from now on. It's not too early to begin."

As if in a trance, Grandin moved toward the rear of his car. This is a dream, he told himself. In a minute I'll wake up and find none of it is real. I'm Ralph Grandin, Professor of Nuclear Physics, and Marcia and Jack and I are taking the vacation we've looked forward to for so long. We aren't standing on the ruins of Los Angeles being robbed of the gasoline that is our only hope of food and life.

He slowly unlocked the trunk to get the quart can he carried and the pliers. As he did so, there came a sudden shout behind him. He whirled about in time to see the robber falling to the ground and Jack wrestling for the gun.

"Jack—you fool!"

At the same time, a surge of admiration that was almost painful went through him. The wiry figure of the boy hurtled at the beefy man and then was darting away, gun in hand.

"He might have shot you!" Grandin exclaimed. "You were a fool —a wonderful fool."

"Wait a minute," said Jack. "I didn't tackle him all by myself. *She* did it, really. She threw a rock that got him in the head. He was down before I jumped him."

"She—?"

Grandin turned in the direction of Jack's gaze. Coming over a nearby pile of rubble were the figures of a woman and two men. All of them were dressed in the tattered remnants of clothes that had been cut to mere shorts and the woman's halter.

"That was a close call," one of the men said.

Suddenly the woman stopped. As if transfixed, she stared at Jack. Her hand clutched the arm of the man who had spoken.

"Brad! It's . . . *him!*"

Something about her voice electrified Grandin. The intensity, the terrifying possessiveness, the way she looked at Jack—

"Delsa . . . no, you can't be sure," the man cautioned.

The man turned to Grandin. "Won't you join us? We have a hide-out over here a short distance. We'll exchange what information we have about this mess."

Grandin had been moving forward slowly. Quickly he took the revolver from Jack's hand. He held it before him.

"No—" he shook his head. "We can't risk it. How do we know you aren't—like him?" He nodded toward the prone form of the Cadillac owner.

"You don't, I suppose. I'll admit there are plenty like him. We have to be on constant guard against them. At least we can sit down and talk."

As Grandin's lips moved to speak, the woman pointed toward Jack again and whispered intensely to her companions. "I know it's him. I know it is. Oh, don't lose him!"

In Marcia's frightened eyes appeared sudden terror. "Ralph! She's crazy. She must think Jack is her dead son or something. Oh, let's get out of here—anywhere, just until we can think again!"

Grandin nodded. "We don't know what's happened," he said to the strangers, "but for the moment we want only isolation and time to think. We're heading east again. We aren't deserting you, because there's nothing we can give you. Maybe you're better off here than we'll be. Maybe we're fools, but that's the way it is. Get in, Marcia and Jack. You turn the car around, Marcia."

As the car spun around, the man who had not spoken made a half-hearted attempt to come a step or two after them. Then he shouted suddenly, "Tell Pete you saw us! Tell him Delsa is not well!"

The words bored into Grandin's consciousness and exploded. He stopped Marcia. "Pete—" he demanded. "What do you know of Pete?"

Before the other could answer, the woman, Delsa, broke away and ran toward the car. Her cries were hysterical. "You can't take him now! Not when we've just just found him—he belongs here!"

Her fanatic gaze was on Jack's white, stolid face. Marcia whispered frantically, "She's crazy, Ralph. I'm afraid of them."

She started the car again and sped down the highway. When the three strangers were out of sight, Grandin took the wheel and began a search for gasoline.

He drove automatically, with the attention of only a fraction of his mind, while the bubble of fear grew. Why was he running away from the three who had come out of the ruins? Already he had abandoned the most elementary amenities of his dead culture. All at once every surviving man had become the enemy of every other man in the bitter

struggle for remaining food and necessities of life. It was as if an unseen vapor had risen from the ruin of the bombs and congealed about their hearts, setting every man against his kind. Later, of course, there would be tribes, wandering, warring tribes. He would want no part of that, he thought, but perhaps it would be essential.

There was another reason that had driven them away from the strangers, however, he told himself. The light in the eyes of the woman they had called Delsa. Her eyes upon Jack. The possessive compulsion Grandin saw there chilled his soul. He understood Marcia's sudden dread. It was that that drove them away. He was not yet ready to declare himself against every man. But what if no man remained who could claim his ties? If they were all murderers, thieves, insane—?

The gasoline search was hopeless. Every station had empty tanks. The locks of the storage tanks had been broken and the last dregs drained away.

"Everything points to the fact that the bombing occurred long ago, yet it must have happened within the last twenty-four hours. Without gas we can't cross the desert. If we can't find any at all, we'll try to find a spot with a flowing well and settle. From there we can explore and find friends—unless everyone has become like those we've seen."

"Maybe we should have stayed—"

"There's no use in our trying to persuade a strange, unbalanced woman that Jack is not her son or some loved one lost in the bombings. She'll be better off without us."

In the back seat, Jack was completely silent. Grandin wondered what thoughts were passing through the boy's mind, but dared not ask. He had just come out of the years of childhood, with the concept of the world beginning to take shape in his mind. Now that entire world was utterly changed without the sight or sound of the processes of change. As Marcia had said it—it would not have been so bad if they could have seen the rockets and heard the sound of the bombs.

Dusk began to settle over the ruined landscape. As the darkness deepened, Grandin debated turning on the lights and decided that it would make them no more conspicuous than they had been during the daytime. On the dust-covered road he could not distinguish the many shapes of broken bricks and rocks. Dozens of times the car jolted and swerved, and Grandin groaned and prayed that the tires would not blow.

He didn't know just when it was that he first became conscious of it, but when he did he knew it had been there for a long time—the sound of another car behind them. Suddenly the lights of it flashed upon them, blinding Grandin with their glare in the rear-view mirror.

At once he thought of the man in the Cadillac. He picked up the gun that lay on the seat where he had dropped it. He edged the car over and slowed.

Surprise rocked through him when the occupants of the other car merely honked and roared past. And in the light of his own headlamps Grandin saw plainly that it was not the Cadillac. It looked more like a bunch of high-school kids in a hot rod.

Then the lights of an oncoming car flashed into their eyes as they rounded a curve. Marcia gasped and pointed ahead. "The lights! It looks as if the whole town of Pomona is lit up as usual. Maybe things aren't as bad as we thought."

"I wonder. There may be complete chaos there. It might be better to bypass the town."

But as they advanced slowly there was no evidence of confusion or disturbance. Streams of cars were moving in the direction from which Grandin had come.

"It doesn't look like they've even heard about it," said Jack.

They passed through a quiet residential section and came to the edge of the business district.

"How can things be going on in perfectly normal fashion here when Los Angeles is in complete ruin only twenty miles away? There should be refugees—"

He pulled up to the curb before a policeman who stood idly watching the movie crowds.

"Aren't the roads to Los Angeles closed?" Grandin demanded. "Hasn't word of the city's destruction been even heard over here?"

For an instant the policeman gaped, then he burst out laughing. "Another one! You're the fourth this week. Say, Bud, just what do they sell in bottles down in Los Angeles? The town bombed again—when's it going to end? I'd run you in, but they had to let the other three guys go when they proved sober. But get going before I change my mind!"

Dazed, Grandin pulled his head back in and stared at the lighted show windows. After a moment he got out and went into the nearest

drugstore. He came back and tossed a newspaper into Marcia's lap—the Los Angeles *Examiner* of current date. Headlines were devoted to city hall scandals and a Hollywood murder.

"Maybe it didn't happen," said Marcia thinly.

"Say, we weren't dreaming it!" Jack protested. "I didn't dream I was tussling with that fat guy for the gun!"

"Look!" Marcia pointed suddenly to a small item at the bottom of the front page. Grandin glanced at the article.

"Los Angeles Bombed," Says Visitor

J. B. Winkler reported to Pomona authorities yesterday that Los Angeles was in ruins, apparently the result of a terrific bombing. Winkler, arrested on a charge of drunkenness, was found to be cold sober but was being held for psychological tests before . . .

Grandin slumped as if something tangible had been exuded suddenly from every pore of his body.

"Mass hallucination—" he said slowly. "How can you explain anything of this kind? It's something that belongs in the collections of Charles Fort and his kind. It's the sort of thing that happens once in a lifetime to one person in a million, and which he never dares repeat. I suppose we can never know. Maybe it was some form of premonition, some flash of vision of the future or of another plane. Whatever it was, we know now that it wasn't real." He glanced back down the highway, where bobbing taillights were vanishing in the direction of Los Angeles. "I've lost all taste for a vacation on the coast. How about it?"

Marcia nodded. "Yes . . . let's just keep going—back. I want to forget the awful sight of those ruins, and that crazy woman reaching out for Jack—but I know I can't really forget it as long as I live."

Grandin stepped on the starter. The motor barely turned over.

"Looks like battery trouble. We'd better stay here for the night and get a fresh start in the morning."

After half a dozen futile tries, Grandin finally managed to get the car to start. He drove it to a garage and found a nearby hotel room for them.

The night's rest made them realize how deep their exhaustion by the

events of the day had been. Next morning they found the car ready when they called for it, but the garage man looked at Grandin in puzzlement.

"That battery of yours was completely shot," he said. "I checked over your ignition system for shorts and found this dingus in your distributor. I don't know what you were doing with it there, but it was sapping your battery to death."

Grandin glanced at the small cylinder the man placed in his palm. "I don't know what the devil this is. How could it get in—?"

Then his mind went back—Pete, his pain-racked form bent over the car, working on the distributor.

"It was fastened to the condenser," said the mechanic, "and your condenser was a cut-down size. I put in another one. It should perk all right now."

"Yeah . . . O.K. Thanks," said Grandin absently.

Pete, the little shiny cylinder—and the man named Brad who said to tell Pete they'd seen him. Suddenly Grandin knew where he was going. He spoke with fierce intensity.

"We've got to see this fellow Pete," he said to Marcia.

She looked at him as if trying to read his thoughts. "Do you think *he* made it happen to us, somehow?"

"I don't know what I think, but he's the only connection between reality and this dream or vision or hallucination or whatever it is. I'm going to find out what Pete's got to do with it.

"Unless Pete was part of the hallucination, too—"

"This cylinder isn't!"

"Let's open the gadget," said Jack.

Grandin held it up between his thumb and forefinger. The case was rough, as if it were some homemade experimental model. He took out his pocketknife and pried off the end opposite the terminals.

At first glance the interior looked like a burned, shapeless mass. Then Grandin saw that it was a mass of small wires burned and fused. Carefully he tried to pick among the destroyed components, but they shattered at the touch of his blade. Only one thing came out whole, a small object that looked like a glass bead. He held it up to the light and rubbed the discoloration from it. He gasped in amazement.

"It looks like an electronic tube of some kind!"

"Maybe this guy Pete isn't as dumb as he looks," said Jack.

The heat of the desert radiated about them and filtered into every cell of their beings as Grandin pushed the decrepit car to its limit over the burning highway. By early afternoon they arrived at the shambles of Pete's garage.

There was no sign of life. All the doors were shut and the windows were obscured by weeks of undisturbed desert sand and dust.

"Bet he flew the coop with the cops on his tail," said Jack.

Grandin got out and pounded on the door of the building, but there was no answer. He tried again. Suddenly, Marcia, sitting in the car, waved and pointed to the west side. Grandin and Jack ran around the corner just as a car drove out. It was in even more battered condition than the building, and Pete was at the wheel.

He looked worse than when they had seen him the day before. Whatever repulsive illness possessed him, its ravages were terrible and progressive.

"Closed up," said Pete. Then his eyes went wide. "You're Grandin—and Jack! You came back."

"Apparently you didn't expect us back."

The man looked at them for a long moment, and slowly the light died out of his eyes. "I didn't know. It's of no consequence. I must be going now. I have business in Los Angeles, and my garage here will not be open any more."

"Aren't you installing any more of these?" Grandin held out the little gadget he had partly disassembled.

"No," said Pete slowly. "I guess I won't be installing any more."

"Come on," said Grandin with unexpected savagery. "I want to know what this is all about. We went to Los Angeles and found ruins there—ruins created by atomic bombing. I've got a detector that showed the radioactivity—"

He stopped. His eyes, on Pete's face, registered first disbelief then astonished recognition.

"Those sores—they're radiation burns! I should have known—"

Pete nodded slowly, painfully. "Yes, now you understand?"

"No. I don't understand anything. Los Angeles is not destroyed."

"But it is. So are Washington, New York, Chicago, and a hundred other cities we've been so proud of. They are destroyed in this continuum—fifteen years from now."

"Fifteen years from now!"

Pete nodded. "I came from out of that time—came back to try to find

a way to prevent the holocaust that I have seen. In my day I saw the bombs fall and our cities wiped out in flames. As far as we knew, more than seventy million were killed before communications became utterly impossible. After that there were only scattered bands in the Los Angeles area.

"The first thing I tried was to establish communication with other groups. During the electronic experiments I discovered the principle of that." His fingers indicated the cylinder.

Grandin glanced down at it. "The principle—?"

"During the unprecedented release of atomic energy that arose during the simultaneous bombings of our cities, something happened to the very time continuum in which we exist. Don't ask me what or how. I don't know. A crook, a twist, a fold—explain it how you will, I accidentally stumbled upon an electronic circuit that would create a field that would enable passage from one folded section to the adjacent section. The fold proved to be about fifteen years in length, so that I found it possible to pass from the time shortly after the destruction to this period."

Grandin listened as if in a trance. Jack's face reflected sober incomprehension. Marcia had come up and now stood listening to Pete's story.

Disbelief struggled with memory in Grandin's face. "Why these?" he said at last, holding up the cylinder.

Pete closed his eyes momentarily against some unknown well of pain. "Suppose—" he said. "Just suppose that every living man could see the horror and feel the desolation and fear that you have seen and felt. Do you think men would allow it to happen if they could know the fear that you have known?"

"It would never happen," breathed Marcia fervently, "if every man could see that world of death."

Grandin glanced down again at the little cylinder. He felt suddenly cold in the blazing radiance of the sun. He looked into Pete's eyes, saw there the searching, the intensity of a dream to turn aside the course of the world.

"That is my hope and my dream," said Pete slowly, when he saw that Grandin was not going to speak. "I built these—" He indicated the cylinder again. "They can be attached to any vehicle. When the vehicle moves across the line where the fold of the time continuum appears, a shift to the future occurs, or vice versa. I have developed an improved

ignition system for automobiles, and an improved carburetion method which will double gasoline efficiency. In both of these devices is incorporated the time changer. I supposed that it might be possible to sell some such device to the auto manufacturers, distribute others through garages, filling stations, and so on. Eventually, millions of cars would be so equipped. Near every city they would be driven through the time fold, and their occupants would witness the ruin their own folly was to bring.

"Only once would the vision be experienced. The time changer is built to be self-destructive on passing back to this side of the fold. But in the mind of every man who saw that vision would burn the reality of the horror to come. It might be enough. I don't know. But reasoning, argument, pleading will never keep man from pulling down the world about his own head. Only fear, terrible, shattering fear of the consequences can persuade him to turn aside from self-destruction. Perhaps a vision of the world lying in death can instill that fear.

"There are other ways to utilize the principle. I have applied it to radios and television sets. Thus these would give for one terrible period of revelation the sight and sound of a dead and dying world. In every country around the earth I hoped that I might recruit agents to help in the distribution of these devices. It's a gigantic task, one that might occupy the lifetime of a well man.

"I'm given no more than a single year to live, and the pain is too great to work more than a few hours in a day. There is no one in my own age to carry on my work. You can imagine what would happen if I tried to get the scientists of this period to listen to me. They'd laugh at me as a crazy, deluded man even if I showed them the time changer."

As Pete spoke, he watched the reaction in Grandin's eyes. He saw disbelief change to bewilderment and slowly melt to uncomprehending sympathy.

"And you do not believe me, either," he said sadly. "I've never told anyone else this story. I thought perhaps you would. . . . I just thought you might—"

Very suddenly he stopped talking as his eyes looked distantly down the road. A battered vehicle as decrepit as his own was shambling up the highway. As it approached the garage it turned into the driveway leading to Pete's.

Grandin's eyes widened and changed as if a specter had loomed in

the air before him. And then dawning belief in the unbelievable and the unreal spread over his face.

The woman, Delsa, and the two men who had appeared with her in the ruins were emerging from the car.

Pete, watching Grandin's amazed countenance, said softly, "The necessity for my trip has ended. Won't you all come in where we can talk?"

In that single moment, watching the three strangers reappear, Grandin felt the loss, the sudden terrible collapse of all his logic and reason, his prejudices and a thousand beliefs and faiths. He had even been ready with an explanation for Pete's burns. Now he knew that all he had seen had been real—somewhere—*sometime.*

Pete introduced the newcomers, including Delsa, who was his wife. This unexpected knowledge gave the Grandins a start and a moment of unease. They searched the face of the woman for a moment's hope that their previous estimate of her madness had been wrong. But her eyes were still upon Jack, and there was eagerness and an unnatural hope burning there.

The two men were Dr. Bradburn and Carl Simons, an assistant physicist who had helped Pete in his electronic work.

There was a moment's stilted acknowledgment of introductions and embarrassing memories.

Delsa said, "It's my fault they came back, Pete. But I was so sure . . . and when I thought of him escaping—"

Pete silenced her with a touch of his hand. "It's all right now, darling. They understand now. I'm sure you do, don't you?" He addressed Grandin and Marcia. "You know the shock you experienced merely passing into that dead city. Perhaps you can understand the shock that my wife—all of us—have known by living through those events and that environment."

Grandin nodded absently. His mind hadn't been thinking of those things. It had leaped ahead to the inevitable conclusions of Pete's story and the concrete evidence of the appearance of these people.

With man's doom so calculable, his purposeless existence had become purposeful and reasonable. There was a goal worthy of all the energies he had so fruitlessly wasted in the eddies and coves of science. All he had done up to now had contributed to the certainty of man's annihilation. To attempt to swerve man's course leading to that futile destiny would be his work from now on.

These were the thoughts that he expressed when they were gathered that evening in the living quarters Pete had erected in part of the garage building.

Dr. Bradburn nodded approvingly. "None of us who have survived the explosions have more than a year to a year and a half to live. Pete has less than any of us. The best he can hope for is to pass his dream into hands that may be able to carry on the work. That is why he has searched so hard for someone who could understand and complete it."

Marcia said, "I'm terribly sorry we misunderstood you and ran away. But it was such a shock. We were not ready to accept anything as friendly in the forbidding scene—especially after that man tried to steal our gas. But what did you mean, Delsa, when you kept speaking of Jack with such emphasis?"

For a moment Delsa's eyes reflected panic. She glanced at Pete, but he seemed not to have heard.

"It was nothing," she said hastily. "Just a fantastic notion that Jack was a certain someone Pete had hoped to find. You'll have to forgive my actions, for the shock of our experiences has been almost too much for me."

As if suddenly coming alive out of a deep trance, Pete began to speak. His eyes were farseeing and staring. "Fear," he said, "only fear will control man's insatiable lusts. We haven't come very far up the evolutionary ladder. Not nearly as far as we've supposed. But man is not so bad that he doesn't deserve a chance to prove what he can do. Only fear can prevent his self-destruction before he ever has that chance. Let every man and woman see the ruin and horror to come. Let it burn in the brain of every magistrate and governor of states and nations. Let it haunt the dreams of every minister of state. Only then will men and their rulers begin to work for eternal peace. Only then will they learn that men, and not things, are of chief importance to man. And perhaps it is a forlorn hope, after all—"

To Jack, listening to this talk of the destiny of man and nations, it seemed as if swift years had passed since dawn. He felt raised to man's estate to have heard such words and seen such sights as had been his in the last two days.

But it seemed more than a brain scarcely into adolescence could endure. He'd forseen a life for himself filled with the excitement of discovery and a thousand skills and inventions of his own hands—but without purpose. Now there was a purpose, foreordained and inevita-

ble, for he knew that his mission was aligned with that of his father for as long as he should live.

When the talk lulled he found his way out into the darkness under the desert stars, and he stood watching them. How long he had been there he did not know, when he heard the sound of a footstep.

He whirled. He recognized the shambling steps of Pete. His first impulse was of fear, for the physical form of the scientist was fearful in the night by the light of the stars and the cloud-swept moon.

"Jack—?" Pete's voice was hesitant.

"Yes?"

"Will you sit down with me—here on the ground?"

Without waiting for answer, Pete slumped to a sitting position with his back against the side of the garage which was filled with his sign. Jack came down beside him.

" 'Pete Can Fix It.' Remember those signs along the highway?"

"Yes," said Jack. "We followed them all the way from Wickenburg. We wondered who this Pete was."

"I've often wondered, too. You see, when I was a boy just about your age I came along this highway with my parents. We were going on a vacation somewhere, but all I can remember is that string of signs, Pete Can Fix It. That's the only thing I have left of the world before the bombs came. Just that and my scientific knowledge and skill. After the bombing I never knew who I was, not even my name. I remembered no friends or anything that I had been—only that crazy sign, Pete Can Fix It, and those few long-ago days when I came down this highway as a boy. But even the faces of the parents who brought me along here are gone from me.

"I came back to this abandoned garage. I thought it might help bring back the memories—and help find someone I once knew.

"Tell me about yourself, Jack. The things you've done, the things you hope to do."

"Nothing much has happened to me," said Jack. "I've never known what I really wanted to do—until now. I went to school at Meredith. That's near Elkins, but I guess you wouldn't know about that. We have a place there where I can have a horse. He's called Baldy, and we're good pals, but he was kind of wild at first."

Pete's voice caught. "And he threw you—"

"Yeah, when I first got him Pop warned me not to ride him until I'd had some training and Baldy had grown used to me. But I was so anx-

ious that I got him out one day and rode him anyway. He threw me and my foot caught in a stirrup. He dragged me a long ways before it jerked loose, carried me over some barbed wire in the field and ripped my chest."

"Yes," Pete whispered suddenly, fiercely, his eyes on the stars overhead. "And you struggled to the house and tried to tell the folks that you fell off the barn because you thought they'd take the horse away from you."

"That's right—but how did you know?" Jack turned and looked into Pete's eyes in a moment's fear.

"I remember now—all of it. Baldy, the old barn and the porch steps that creaked— Look!"

Pete suddenly opened his shirt, and the moon soared into full brilliance with a sudden crescendo of light that struck the jagged, livid scar that ran across his chest. Jack stared at it a moment, then gasped in horror. He recognized the fishhook shape in the center of his chest.

"You went up to your room alone and prayed that night that Baldy would't be taken away—"

"Don't!" Jack cried out.

"Don't be afraid," said Pete softly. "You see now why I came back to this road, why I had to find you. You have to know and understand. No one else can carry on my work as you can. Not even—your father. Within two or three months I'll be utterly useless. In a year I'll be dead. Learn from . . . your father . . . learn all the science and technique that you can cram into your head. Develop the skill of your hands. Fear—fill the whole earth with fear—fear of man's own evil. Maybe I haven't got the answer. Maybe there is no answer. But do your best. I've tried to do mine."

Mercifully, the moon's light was hidden for an instant while Jack's eyes fought back the stinging and his young spirit wrestled with the sudden weight that was hardly bearable to it.

Then after a moment he said quietly, "I'll do the best I can."

There was a step around the edge of the building, and they recognized the silhouette of Grandin.

"Let's . . . just not tell them, shall we?" said Pete. "It will be easier on . . . your father and mother if they don't know." He glanced down at the repulsive flesh that was himself.

In the darkness Jack swallowed hard and choked back the surging

in his throat. He extended a hand. "Yeah, that's best. We won't tell 'em."

Slowly Pete moved away to enter the building. Grandin came up. "We wondered what had happened to you, Jack. What were you doing out here?"

"Pete and I were just talking. I'm ready to come in now."

As they moved away from the wall, Jack glanced back at the enormous letters: Pete's. And at the smaller, defiant boast: Pete Can Fix It.

"You know," Jack said suddenly. His voice became steady and confident as he stepped forward to match his father's stride. "You know, somehow I think that maybe Pete *can* fix it."

PARALLEL WORLDS

AN ANALYSIS of stories dealing with alternate or parallel worlds elicits the fact that some science-fiction writers—the earlier ones in particular—conceived of the fourth dimension as a purely *spatial* extension: an effect they achieved in various odd ways. In stories of this genre, a few examples of which will be found in the following pages, the dimensional concept was like that found in other early tales that did not involve alternate worlds at all. The authors of these stories dabbled in tesseracts (a fourth-dimensional geometrical construction —Robert Heinlein's "And He Built a Crooked House" is a fine example); mirrors (Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass" is an enchanting non-science-fiction prototype); or spatial loops through which one could reach into a man's middle and remove his appendix without cutting him open (Dr. Breuer, represented in this section by "The Gostak and the Doshes," did a story about exactly that feat some twenty-five years ago; it was called "The Appendix and the Spectacles"); and various other nontemporal techniques.

These tales were delightful, but they don't really fit the pattern of this book. Among the following stories, the one that most clearly exhibits the idea of the fourth dimension as a spatial extension is Dr. Breuer's *ocular* concept. Other tales can be considered in that light if you choose, though they can also be viewed as time-difference worlds, or worlds based on different space-time coordinates.

Peter Cartur

THE MIST

This cold little item (by a gentleman whose real name is not Peter Cartur, though what it is I don't know) is a good one to introduce you to the Other Worlds that are the business of this section. Of course, not all will be as goosefleshed as this, but it's at least well to be forewarned.

THE big man grunted, then spoke slowly. "Can't do that, mister. I go into town Saturday nights. This is Saturday night."

The little man on the porch was trembling as he leaned forward, trying to catch the words above the noise of the hounds baying in the side yard. His small, alert face was pale, drawn, his eyes too eager. He gave the appearance of being smaller, somehow, than he should be—as though he were shrunken. His clothes hung on him, too large. His eyes were tired, lost-looking.

"Mr.—Mr. Brown, please listen. If this is real, this time—not a rumor —Please!"

Brown shook his head slowly, his eyes careful.

"But it's what I've searched for, Mr. Brown. You've seen it. Others have. You've sworn to the truth of it."

"Sure." Brown spat, nodded his head. "Sure. And them as says we ain't are liars for sure."

"I know. . . . Mr. Brown, I'm an investigator of psychic phenomena—of ghosts and things. I *must* see that apparition tonight." The shrunken man closed his eyes for an instant, leaned against the porch post.

"Saturday night."

"But, Mr. Brown—This will be the last night."

"Might be here right along, now. I dunno."

"*I* know, Mr. Brown." The little man rubbed at his finger with the big golden ring on it. "I know. Another ten minutes at the most. And I've got to—" He stopped, let his eyes beg for him.

"Well, I reckon it's worth lookin' at, right enough."

"You're—sure of what it looks like?"

"I know what I seen. Golden and glowing, it is. You gotta have dark

to see it. Real dark. It don't move, exactly. Just stays still but sorta shimmies like."

"That's it, Mr. Brown. I've got to see it!"

"Reckon that's out, mister. I'm goin' to town."

Brown watched the little man's eyes, saw the pain in them. "Course, if it's worth somethin'—Reckon it'd have to be for me to stay home Saturday night."

"It would take a minute—A moment."

"I gotta be getting along."

"It's worth everything to me, Mr. Brown. Everything."

"How much?"

"I—I don't have money."

"Hunh!"

"I begged rides for seven hundred miles to get here."

Brown shook his head. "Nice ring you got . . . Well, I gotta be gettin' to town."

The little man dropped his hand to his side. Then he raised it again. His eyes, too, moved to the curiously shaped ring on his finger.

"I—can't let you have that."

Brown shrugged his big shoulders, stepped back and fingered the inside doorknob.

"I gotta lock up now an' let out the hounds. . . . Don't be hangin' around the yard when I let out the hounds."

"No . . . Wait— You can have the ring."

Brown closed his eyes. "I don't know—"

"You can have it."

The big man opened the screen door, took the ring. He stepped back so the little man could come through the doorway. Brown struck a match, lit the lamp on the table. He turned the ring over and over, very slowly, in his thick fingers. His eyes squinted shrewdly. Golden, but not gold. Too heavy for gold—or any other metal. Much too large for the little man's fingers. Brown pushed it on his last finger, felt it grip the flesh.

The little man, moving nervously, found the bedroom door.

Brown gave him a rough shove. "Go ahead. You paid, and it ain't nothin' to hurt a man."

But the little man stood aside, let Brown lead the way.

It was a golden blot in the air, shimmering in the center of the bedroom. Eight feet high, perhaps, and about four wide.

Brown laughed coarsely. "Not a spook, is it, mister? I knew it wasn't. Reckon you was paying for a spook. Course, I didn't say it was a spook."

The little man's face hardened. He looked at Brown appraisingly, sadly. Then he shrugged.

"I can't quite believe you really walked through that, Brown."

"Sure." The big man laughed. "Sure I did. Watch."

"Wait. I'll walk with you. Wait!" The little man stepped forward, then, as though still uncertain, put his fingers on Brown's arm. "All right."

Together they moved forward into the golden mist.

It was different for the big man—this time. As they entered the mist he felt sharp tingles dance over his skin. Before, there had been nothing but the feel of air. He started to step back, was stopped by surprising strength from the little man. Brown was forced forward.

The tingling was almost unbearable. It seemed to come in hot flashes, now, from the finger that wore the ring. Brown hurried, trying to get back to the familiar bedroom.

They stepped out of the mist.

There was no familiar bedroom. The house was gone, and with it the night.

Daylight. Daytime on a countryside where the grass was blue as Brown had never seen it, and where trees were slender, unbranched needles reaching for an orange sky. A sky in which Brown could see three gigantic suns.

The big man ripped free, swore, spun back to face the mist. The little man shook his head.

"We just made it, Brown. The mist is gone."

The little man was changing. He seemed to grow, fill out his clothes. "I'm sorry, Brown. I couldn't get through except with the ring—or with someone wearing the ring. . . . That meant it had to be you."

"This is crazy. Where—" The big man stopped, looked again at the suns. He rubbed his forehead.

"Home. *My* home. . . . Find another mist while you wear the ring. Then go home . . . to your home."

"But—a mist?"

"You'll hear rumors. Wild tales. We have stories of ghosts here, too. Be an investigator. Track down those rumors."

"But—"

"Good luck, Brown."

The little man turned quickly, began walking across the strange blue grass. Once he looked back, saw Brown staring helplessly after him. He hesitated for an instant, then hurried on. In a moment he was among the needle trees, then out of Brown's sight.

Miles J. Breuer, M.D.

THE GOSTAK AND THE DOSHES

Once in a long while, when browsing through the files of the older science-fiction magazines, one finds a neglected gem that sheds a bright and pleasant light, unlike a high proportion of the stories published at the time, which can only be described as turgid. The following tale, though perhaps a bit overwritten (Dr. Breuer was not a professional writer), combines an amiably bizarre imagination with a strong feeling for social criticism.

If Ogden and Richards, famed originators of certain aspects of modern semantic theory, have never read this story before, they will be pleasantly surprised, I think, should they read it here. It shows what you really *can do if you honestly set out, as a patriotic gostak, to distim the doshes!*

> Let the reader suppose that somebody states: *"The gostak distims the doshes."* You do not know what this means, nor do I. But if we assume that it is English, we know that the *doshes* are *distimmed* by the *gostak*. We know that one *distimmer* of the *doshes* is a *gostak*. If, moreover, doshes are galloons, we know that some galloons are distimmed by the gostak. And so we may go on, and so we often do go on.—Unknown writer quoted by Ogden and Richards, in *The Meaning of Meaning,* Harcourt Brace & Co., 1923; also by Walter N. Polakov in *Man and His Affairs,* Williams & Wilkins, 1925.

"WHY! That is lifting yourself by your own bootstraps!" I exclaimed in amazed incredulity. "It's absurd."

Woleshensky smiled indulgently. He towered in his chair as though in the infinite kindness of his vast mind there were room to understand and overlook all the foolish little foibles of all the weak little beings that called themselves men. A mathematical physicist lives in vast spaces where a light-year is a footstep, where universes are being born and blotted out, where space unrolls along a fourth dimension on a

surface distended from a fifth. To him, human beings and their affairs do not loom very important.

"Relativity," he explained. In his voice there was a patient forbearance for my slowness of comprehension. "Merely relativity. It doesn't take much physical effort to make the moon move through the treetops, does it? Just enough to walk down the garden path."

I stared at him, and he continued: "If you had been born and raised on a moving train, no one could convince you that the landscape was not in rapid motion. Well, our conception of the universe is quite as relative as that. Sir Isaac Newton tried in his mathematics to express a universe as though beheld by an infinitely removed and perfectly fixed observer. Mathematicians since his time, realizing the futility of such an effort, have taken into consideration that what things 'are' depends upon the person who is looking at them. They have tried to express common knowledge, such as the law of gravitation, in terms that would hold good for all observers. Yet their leader and culminating genius, Einstein, has been unable to express knowledge in terms of pure relativity; he has had to accept the velocity of light as an arbitrarily fixed constant. Why should the velocity of light be any more fixed and constant than any other quantity in the universe?"

"But what's that got to do with going into the fourth dimension?" I broke in impatiently.

He continued as though I hadn't spoken.

"The thing that interests us now, and that mystifies modern mathematicians, is the question of movement, or, more accurately, translation. Is there such a thing as *absolute translation?* Can there be movement—translation—except in *relation* to something else than the thing that moves? All movement we know of is movement in relation to other objects, whether it be a walk down the street or the movement of the earth in its orbit around the sun. A change of *relative* position. But the mere translation of an isolated object existing alone in space is mathematically inconceivable, for there is no such thing as space in that sense."

"I thought you said something about going into another universe—" I interrupted again.

You can't argue with Woleshensky. His train of thought went on without a break.

"By translation we understand getting from one place to another. 'Going somewhere' originally meant a movement of our bodies. Yet, as

a matter of fact, when we drive in an automobile we 'go somewhere' without moving our bodies at all. The scene is changed around us; we are somewhere else; and yet we haven't *moved* at all.

"Or suppose you could cast off gravitational attraction for a moment and let the earth rotate under you; you would be going somewhere and yet not moving—"

"But that is theory; you can't tinker with gravitation—"

"Every day you tinker with gravitation. When you start upward in an elevator, your pressure, not your weight, against the floor of it is increased; apparent gravitation between you and the floor of the elevator is greater than before—and that's like gravitation is anyway: inertia and acceleration. But we are talking about translation. The position of everything in the universe must be referred to some sort of coordinates. Suppose we change the angle or direction of the coordinates: then you have 'gone somewhere' and yet you haven't moved, nor has anything else moved."

I looked at him, holding my head in my hands.

"I couldn't swear that I understand that," I said slowly. "And I repeat that it looks like lifting yourself by your own bootstraps."

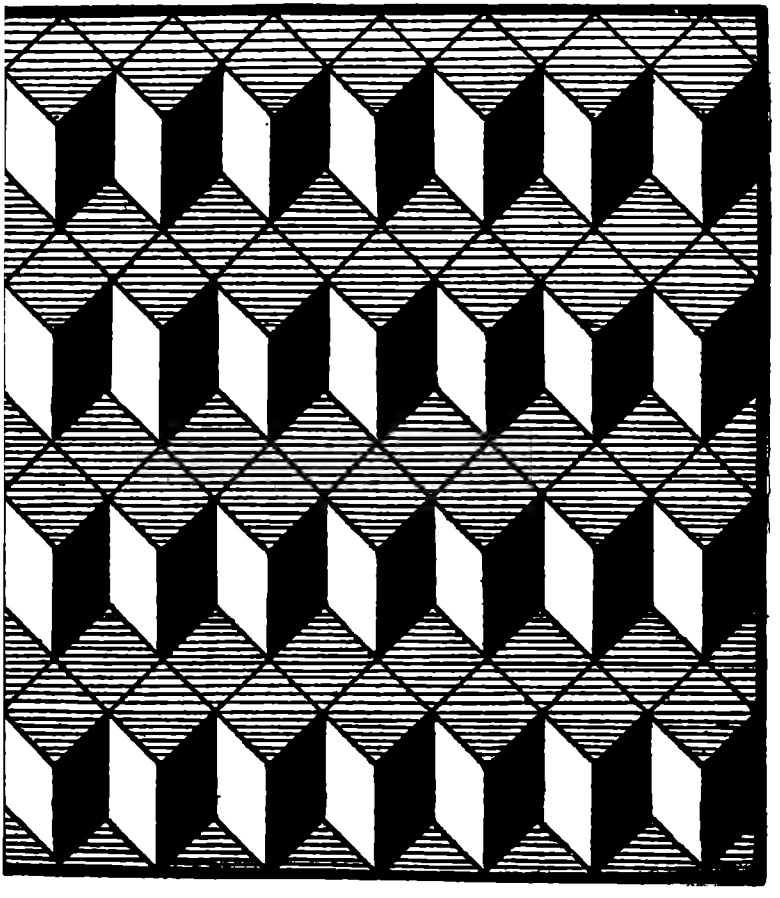
The homely simile did not dismay him. He pointed a finger at me as he spoke. "You've seen a chip of wood bobbing on the ripples of a pond. Now you think the chip is moving, now the water. Yet neither is moving; the only motion is of an abstract thing called a wave.

"You've seen those 'illusion' diagrams—for instance, this one of a group of cubes. Make up your mind that you are looking down upon their upper surfaces, and indeed they seem below you. Now change your mind and imagine that you are down below, looking up. Behold, you see their lower surfaces; you are indeed below them. You have 'gone somewhere,' yet there has been no translation of anything. You have merely changed coordinates."

"Which do you think will drive me insane more quickly—if you *show* me what you mean, or if you keep on talking without showing me?"

"I'll try to show you. There are some types of mind, you know, that cannot grasp the idea of relativity. It isn't the mathematics involved that matters; it's just the inability of some types of mental organization to grasp the fact that the mind of the observer endows his environment with certain properties which have no absolute existence. Thus, when you walk through the garden at night the moon floats from one treetop

another. Is your mind good enough to invert this: make the moon and still and let the trees move backward? Can you do that? If so, ou can 'go somewhere' into another dimension."



Make up your mind that you are looking down upon the upper surfaces of the cubes, and indeed they seem below you. Now change your mind, and imagine that you are looking up. Behold, you see their lower surfaces

Woleshensky rose and walked to the window. His office was an appropriate setting for such a modern discussion as was ours—situated in new, ultramodern building on the university campus, the varnish

glossy, the walls clean, the books neatly arranged behind clean glass, the desk in most orderly array; the office was just as precise and modern and wonderful as the mind of its occupant.

"When do you want to go?" he asked.

"Now!"

"Then I have two more things to explain to you. The fourth dimension is just as much *here* as anywhere else. Right here around you and me things exist and go forward in the fourth dimension; but we do not see them and are not conscious of them because we are confined to our own three. Secondly: If we name the four coordinates as Einstein does, $x, y, z,$ and $t,$ then we exist in $x, y,$ and z and move freely about in them, but are powerless to move in $t.$ Why? Because t is the time dimension; and the time dimension is a difficult one for biological structures that depend on irreversible chemical reactions for their existence. But biochemical reactions can take place along any one of the other dimensions as well as along $t.$

"Therefore, let us transform coordinates. Rotate the property of chemical irreversibility from t to $z.$ Since we are organically able to exist (or at least to perceive) in only three dimensions at once, our new time dimension will be $z.$ We shall be unconscious of z and cannot travel in it. Our activities and consciousness will take place along $x, y,$ and $t.$

"According to fiction writers, to switch into the t dimension, some sort of apparatus with an electrical field ought to be necessary. It is not. You need nothing more to rotate into the t dimension than you do to stop the moon and make the trees move as you ride down the road; or than you do to turn the cubes upside down. It is a matter of *relativity.*"

I had ceased trying to wonder or to understand.

"Show me!" was all I could gasp.

"The success of this experiment in changing from the z to the t coordinate has depended largely upon my lucky discovery of a favorable location. It is just as, when you want the moon to ride the treetops successfully, there have to be favorable features in the topography or it won't work. The edge of this building and that little walk between the two rows of Norway poplars seems to be an angle between planes in the z and t dimensions. It seems to slope downward, does it not?—Now walk from here to the end and imagine yourself going upward.

That is all. Instead of feeling this building behind and *above* you, conceive it as behind and *below*. Just as on your ride by moonlight, you must tell yourself that the moon is not moving while the trees ride by. —Can you do that? Go ahead, then." He spoke in a confident tone, as though he knew exactly what would happen.

Half credulous, half wondering, I walked slowly out of the door. I noticed that Woleshensky settled himself down to the table with a pad and a pencil to some kind of study, and forgot me before I had finished turning around. I looked curiously at the familiar wall of the building and the still more familiar poplar walk, expecting to see some strange scenery, some unknown view from another world. But there were the same old bricks and trees that I had known so long, though my disturbed and wondering frame of mind endowed them with a sudden strangeness and unwontedness. Things I had known for some years, they were, yet so powerfully had Woleshensky's arguments impressed me that I already fancied myself in a different universe. According to the conception of relativity, objects of the *x, y, z* universe *ought* to look different when viewed from the *x, y, t* universe.

Strange to say, I had no difficulty at all in imagining myself as going *upward* on my stroll along the slope. I told myself that the building was behind and below me, and indeed it seemed real that it was that way. I walked some distance along the little avenue of poplars, which seemed familiar enough in all its details, though after a few minutes it struck me that the avenue seemed rather long. In fact, it was much longer than I had ever known it to be before.

With a queer Alice-in-Wonderland feeling I noted it stretching way on ahead of me. Then I looked back.

I gasped in astonishment. The building was indeed *below* me. I looked down upon it from the top of an elevation. The astonishment of that realization had barely broken over me when I admitted that there was a building down there; but what building? Not the new Morton Hall, at any rate. It was a long, three-story brick building, quite resembling Morton Hall, but it was not the same. And on beyond there were trees with buildings among them; but it was not the campus that I knew.

I paused in a kind of panic. What was I to do now? Here I was in a strange place. How I had gotten there I had no idea. What ought I do about it? Where should I go? How was I to get back? Odd that I had

neglected the precaution of how to get back. I surmised that I must be on the *t* dimension. Stupid blunder on my part, neglecting to find out how to get back.

I walked rapidly down the slope toward the building. Any hopes that I might have had about its being Morton Hall were thoroughly dispelled in a moment. It was a totally strange building, old, and old-fashioned looking. I had never seen it before in my life. Yet it looked perfectly ordinary and natural and was obviously a university classroom building.

I cannot tell whether it was an hour or a dozen that I spent walking frantically this way and that, trying to decide to go into this building or another, and at the last moment backing out in a sweat of hesitation. It seemed like a year but was probably only a few minutes. Then I noticed the people. They were mostly young people, of both sexes. Students, of course. Obviously I was on a university campus. Perfectly natural, normal young people, they were. If I were really on the *t* dimension, it certainly resembled the *z* dimension very closely.

Finally I came to a decision. I could stand this no longer. I selected a solitary, quiet-looking man and stopped him.

"Where am I?" I demanded.

He looked at me in astonishment. I waited for a reply, and he continued to gaze at me speechlessly. Finally it occurred to me that he didn't understand English.

"Do you speak English?" I asked hopelessly.

"Of course!" he said vehemently. "What's wrong with you?"

"Something's wrong with something," I exclaimed. "I haven't any idea where I am or how I got here."

"Synthetic wine?" he asked sympathetically.

"Oh, hell! Think I'm a fool? Say, do you have a good man in mathematical physics on the faculty? Take me to him."

"Psychology, I should think," he said, studying me. "Or psychiatry. But I'm a law student and know nothing of either."

"Then make it mathematical physics, and I'll be grateful to you."

So I was conducted to the mathematical physicist. The student led me into the very building that corresponded to Morton Hall, and into an office the position of which quite corresponded to that of Woleshensky's office. However, the office was older and dustier; it had a Victorian look about it and was not as modern as Woleshensky's room. Professor Vibens was a rather small, bald-headed man with a

keen-looking face. As I thanked the law student and started on my story, he looked rather bored, as though wondering why I had picked on him with my tale of wonder. Before I had gotten very far he straightened up a little; and farther along he pricked up another notch; and before many minutes he was tense in his chair as he listened to me. When I finished, his comment was terse, like that of a man accustomed to thinking accurately and to the point.

"Obviously you come into this world from another set of coordinates. As we are on the *z* dimension, you must have come to us from the *t* dimension—"

He disregarded my attempts to protest at this point.

"Your man Woleshensky has evidently developed the conception of relativity further than we have, although Monpeters's theory comes close enough to it. Since I have no idea how to get you back, you must be my guest. I shall enjoy hearing all about your world."

"That is very kind of you," I said gratefully. "I'm accepting because I can't see what else to do. At least until the time when I can find myself a place in your world or get back to my own. Fortunately," I added as an afterthought, "no one will miss me there, unless it be a few classes of students who will welcome the little vacation that must elapse before my successor is found."

Breathlessly eager to find out what sort of world I had gotten into, I walked with him to his home. And I may state at the outset that if I had found everything upside down and outlandishly bizarre, I should have been far less amazed and astonished than I was. For, from the walk that first evening from Professor Vibens's office along several blocks of residence street to his solid and respectable home, through all of my goings about the town and country during the years that I remained in the *t*-dimensional world, I found people and things thoroughly ordinary and familiar. They looked and acted as we do, and their homes and goods looked like ours. I cannot possibly imagine a world and a people that could be more similar to ours without actually being the same. It was months before I got over the idea that I had merely wandered into an unfamiliar part of my own city. Only the actual experience of wide travel and much sight-seeing, and the knowledge that there was no such extensive English-speaking country in the world that I knew, convinced me that I must be on some other world, doubtless in the *t* dimension.

"A gentleman who has found his way here from another universe,"

the professor introduced me to a strapping young fellow who was mowing the lawn.

The professor's son was named John! Could anything be more commonplace?

"I'll have to take you around and show you things tomorrow," John said cordially, accepting the account of my arrival without surprise.

A redheaded servant girl, roast pork and rhubarb sauce for dinner, and checkers afterward, a hot bath at bedtime, the ringing of a telephone somewhere else in the house—is it any wonder that it was months before I would believe that I had actually come into a different universe? What slight differences there were in the people and the world merely served to emphasize the similarity. For instance, I think they were just a little more hospitable and "old-fashioned" than we are. Making due allowances for the fact that I was a rather remarkable phenomenon, I think I was welcomed more heartily in this home and in others later, people spared me more of their time and interest from their daily business, than would have happened under similar circumstances in a correspondingly busy city in America.

Again, John found a lot of time to take me about the city and show me banks and stores and offices. He drove a little squat car with tall wheels, run by a spluttering gasoline motor. (The car was not as perfect as our modern cars, and horses were quite numerous in the streets. Yet John was a busy businessman, the district superintendent of a life-insurance agency.) Think of it! Life insurance in Einstein's t dimension.

"You're young to be holding such an important position," I suggested.

"Got started early," John replied. "Dad is disappointed because I didn't see fit to waste time in college. Disgrace to the family, I am."

What in particular shall I say about the city? It might have been any one of a couple of hundred American cities. Only it wasn't. The electric streetcars, except for their bright green color, were perfect; they might have been brought over bodily from Oshkosh or Tulsa. The ten-cent stores with gold letters on their signs; drugstores with soft drinks; a mad, scrambling stock exchange; the blaring sign of an advertising dentist; brilliant entrances to motion-picture theaters were all there. The beauty shops did wonders to the women's heads, excelling our own by a good deal, if I am any judge; and at that time I had nothing more important on my mind than to speculate on that ques-

tion. Newsboys bawled the *Evening Sun* and the *Morning Gale,* in whose curious, flat type I could read accounts of legislative doings, murders, and divorces quite as fluently as I could in my own *Tribune* at home. Strangeness and unfamiliarity had bothered me a good deal on a trip to Quebec a couple of years before; but they were not noticeable here in the t dimension.

For three or four weeks the novelty of going around, looking at things, meeting people, visiting concerts, theaters, and department stores was sufficient to absorb my interest. Professor Vibens's hospitality was so sincerely extended that I did not hesitate to accept, though I assured him that I would repay it as soon as I got established in this world. In a few days I was thoroughly convinced that there was no way back home. Here I must stay, at least until I learned as much as Woleshensky knew about crossing dimensions. Professor Vibens eventually secured for me a position at the university.

It was shortly after I had accepted the position as instructor in experimental physics and had begun to get broken into my work that I noticed a strange commotion among the people of the city. I have always been a studious recluse, observing people as phenomena rather than participating in their activities. So for some time I noted only in a subconscious way the excited gathering in groups, the gesticulations and blazing eyes, the wild sale of extra editions of papers, the general air of disturbance. I even failed to take an active interest in these things when I made a railroad journey of three hundred miles and spent a week in another city; so thoroughly at home did I feel in this world that when the advisability arose of my studying laboratory methods in another university, I made the trip alone. So absorbed was I in my laboratory problems that I only noted with half an eye the commotion and excitement everywhere, and merely recollected it later. One night it suddenly popped into my head that the country was aroused over something.

That night I was with the Vibens family in their living room. John tuned in the radio. I wasn't listening to the thing very much; I had troubles of my own. $F=g\frac{m_1m_2}{r^2}$ was familiar enough to me. It meant the same and held as rigidly here as in my old world. But what was the name of the bird who had formulated that law? Back home it was Newton. Tomorrow in class I would have to be thoroughly familiar with his name. Pasvieux, that's what it was. What messy surnames. It

struck me that it was lucky that they expressed the laws of physics in the same form and even in the same algebraic letters, or I might have had a time getting them confused—when all of a sudden the radio blatantly bawled: "THE GOSTAK DISTIMS THE DOSHES!"

John jumped to his feet.

"Damn right!" he shouted, slamming the table with his fist.

Both his father and mother annihilated him with withering glances, and he slunk from the room. I gazed stupefied. My stupefaction continued while the professor shut off the radio and both of them excused themselves from my presence. Then suddenly I was alert.

I grabbed a bunch of newspapers, having seen none for several days. Great sprawling headlines covered the front pages:

"THE GOSTAK DISTIMS THE DOSHES."

For a moment I stopped, trying to recollect where I had heard those words before. They recalled something to me. Ah, yes! That very afternoon there had been a commotion beneath my window on the university campus. I had been busy checking over an experiment so that I might be sure of its success at tomorrow's class, and looked out rather absently to see what was going on. A group of young men from a dismissed class was passing and had stopped for a moment.

"I say, the gostak distims the doshes!" said a fine-looking young fellow. His face was pale and strained.

The young man facing him sneered derisively, "Aw, your grandmother! Don't be a feeble—"

He never finished. The first fellow's fist caught him in the cheek. Several books dropped to the ground. In a moment the two had clinched and were rolling on the ground, fists flying up and down, smears of blood appearing here and there. The others surrounded them and for a moment appeared to enjoy the spectacle, but suddenly recollected that it looked rather disgraceful on a university campus, and after a lively tussle separated the combatants. Twenty of them, pulling in two directions, tugged them apart.

The first boy strained in the grasp of his captors; his white face was flecked with blood and he panted for breath.

"Insult!" he shouted, giving another mighty heave to get free. He looked contemptuously around. "The whole bunch of you ought to learn to stand up for your honor. The gostak distims the doshes!"

That was the astonishing incident that these words called to my mind. I turned back to my newspapers.

"Slogan Sweeps the Country," proclaimed the subheads. "Ringing Expression of National Spirit! Enthusiasm Spreads Like Wildfire! The new patriotic slogan is gaining ground rapidly," the leading article went on. "The fact that it has covered the country almost instantaneously seems to indicate that it fills a deep and long-felt want in the hearts of the people. It was first uttered during a speech in Walkingdon by that majestic figure in modern statesmanship, Senator Harob. The beautiful sentiment, the wonderful emotion of this sublime thought, are epoch-making. It is a great conception, doing credit to a great man, and worthy of being the guiding light of a great people—"

That was the gist of everything I could find in the papers. I fell asleep still puzzled about the thing. I was puzzled because—as I see now and didn't see then—I was trained in the analytical methods of physical science and knew little or nothing about the ways and emotions of the masses of the people.

In the morning the senseless expression popped into my head as soon as I awoke. I determined to waylay the first member of the Vibens family who showed up, and demand the meaning of the thing. It happened to be John.

"John, what's a gostak?"

John's face lighted up with pleasure. He threw out his chest and a look of pride replaced the pleasure. His eyes blazed, and with a consuming enthusiasm he shook hands with me, as deacons shake hands with a new convert—a sort of glad welcome.

"The gostak!" he exclaimed. "Hurray for the gostak!"

"But what is a gostak?"

"Not *a* gostak! *The* gostak. The gostak is—the distimmer of the doshes—see! He distims 'em, see?"

"Yes, yes. But what is distimming? How do you distim?"

"No, no! Only the gostak can distim. The gostak distims the doshes. See?"

"Ah, I see!" I exclaimed. Indeed, I pride myself on my quick wit. "What are doshes? Why, they are the stuff distimmed by the gostak. Very simple!"

"Good for you!" John slapped my back in huge enthusiasm. "I think it wonderful for you to understand us so well after being here only a short time. You are very patriotic."

I gritted my teeth tightly to keep myself from speaking.

"Professor Vibens, what's a gostak?" I asked in the solitude of his office an hour later.

He looked pained.

He leaned back in his chair and looked me over elaborately, and waited some time before answering.

"Hush!" he finally whispered. "A scientific man may think what he pleases, but if he says too much, people in general may misjudge him. As a matter of fact, a good many scientific men are taking this so-called patriotism seriously. But a mathematician cannot use words loosely; it has become second nature with him to inquire closely into the meaning of every term he uses."

"Well, doesn't that jargon mean anything at all?" I was beginning to be puzzled in earnest.

"To me it does not. But it seems to mean a great deal to the public in general. It's making people do things, is it not?"

I stood a while in stupefied silence. That an entire great nation should become fired up over a meaningless piece of nonsense! Yet the astonishing thing was that I had to admit there was plenty of precedent for it in the history of my own z-dimensional world. A nation exterminating itself in civil wars to decide which of two profligate royal families should be privileged to waste the people's substance from the throne; a hundred thousand crusaders marching to death for an idea that to me means nothing; a meaningless, untrue advertising slogan that sells millions of dollars' worth of cigarettes to a nation, to the latter's own detriment—haven't we seen it over and over again?

"There's a public lecture on this stuff tonight at the First Church of the Salvation," Professor Vibens suggested.

"I'll be there," I said. "I want to look into the thing."

That afternoon there was another flurry of "extras" over the street; people gathered in knots and gesticulated with open newspapers.

"War! Let 'em have it!" I heard men shout.

"Is our national honor a rag to be muddied and trampled on?" the editorials asked.

As far as I could gather from reading the papers, there was a group of nations across an ocean that was not taking the gostak seriously. A ship whose pennant bore the slogan had been refused entrance to an Engtalian harbor because it flew no national ensign. The Executive had dispatched a diplomatic note. An evangelist who had attempted to

preach the gospel of the distimmed doshes at a public gathering in Itland had been ridden on a rail and otherwise abused. The Executive was dispatching a diplomatic note.

Public indignation waxed high. Derogatory remarks about "wops" were flung about. Shouts of "Holy war!" were heard. I could feel the tension in the atmosphere as I took my seat in the crowded church in the evening. I had been assured that the message of the gostak and the doshes would be thoroughly expounded so that even the most simple-minded and uneducated people could understand it fully. Although I had my hands full at the university, I was so puzzled and amazed at the course events were taking that I determined to give the evening to finding out what the slogan meant.

There was a good deal of singing before the lecture began. Mimeographed copies of the words were passed about, but I neglected to preserve them and do not remember them. I know there was one solemn hymn that reverberated harmoniously through the great church, a chanting repetition of "The Gostak Distims the Doshes." There was another stirring martial air that began: "Oh, the Gostak! Oh, the Gostak!"—and ended with a swift cadence on "The Gostak Distims the Doshes!" The speaker had a rich, eloquent voice and a commanding figure. He stepped out and bowed solemnly.

"The gostak distims the doshes," he pronounced impressively. "Is it not comforting to know that there is a gostak; do we not glow with pride because the doshes are distimmed? In the entire universe there is no more profoundly significant fact: the gostak distims the doshes. Could anything be more complete yet more tersely emphatic! The gostak distims the doshes!" Applause. "This thrilling truth affects our innermost lives. What would we do if the gostak did not distim the doshes? Without the gostak, without doshes, what would we do? What would we think? How would we feel?" Applause again.

At first I thought this was some kind of introduction. I was inexperienced in listening to popular speeches, lectures, and sermons. I had spent most of my life in the study of physics and its accessory sciences. I could not help trying to figure out the meaning of whatever I heard. When I found none, I began to get impatient. I waited some more, thinking that soon he would begin on the real explanation. After thirty minutes of the same sort of stuff as I have just quoted, I gave up trying to listen. I just sat and hoped he would soon be through. The people applauded and grew more excited. After an hour I stirred restlessly; I

slouched down in my seat and sat up by turns. After two hours I grew desperate; I got up and walked out. Most of the people were too excited to notice me. Only a few of them cast hostile glances at my retreat.

The next day the mad nightmare began for me. First there was a snowstorm of extras over the city, announcing the sinking of a merchantman by an Engtalian cruiser. A dispute had arisen between the officers of the merchantman and the port officials, because the latter had jeered disrespectfully at the gostak. The merchantman picked up and started out without having fulfilled all the customs requirements. A cruiser followed it and ordered it to return. The captain of the merchantman told them that the gostak distims the doshes, whereupon the cruiser fired twice and sank the merchantman. In the afternoon came the extras announcing the Executive's declaration of war.

Recruiting offices opened; the university was depleted of its young men; uniformed troops marched through the city, and railway trains full of them went in and out. Campaigns for raising war loans; homeguards, women's auxiliaries, ladies' aid societies making bandages, young women enlisting as ambulance drivers—it was indeed war; all of it to the constantly repeated slogan: "The gostak distims the doshes."

I could hardly believe that it was really true. There seemed to be no adequate cause for a war. The huge and powerful nation had dreamed a silly slogan and flung it in the world's face. A group of nations across the water had united into an alliance, claiming they had to defend themselves against having forced upon them a principle they did not desire. The whole thing at the bottom had no meaning. It did not seem possible that there would actually be a war; it seemed more like going through a lot of elaborate play-acting.

Only when the news came of a vast naval battle of doubtful issue, in which ships had been sunk and thousands of lives lost, did it come to me that they meant business. Black bands of mourning appeared on sleeves and in windows. One of the allied countries was invaded and a front line set up. Reports of a division wiped out by an airplane attack; of forty thousand dead in a five-day battle; of more men and more money needed, began to make things look real. Haggard men with bandaged heads and arms in slings appeared on the streets, a church and an auditorium were converted into hospitals, and trainloads of wounded were brought in. To convince myself that this thing was so, I

visited these wards and saw with my own eyes the rows of cots, the surgeons working on ghastly wounds, the men with a leg missing or with a hideously disfigured face.

Food became restricted; there was no white bread, and sugar was rationed. Clothing was of poor quality; coal and oil were obtainable only on government permit. Businesses were shut down. John was gone; his parents received news that he was missing in action.

Real it was; there could be no more doubt of it. The thing that made it seem most real was the picture of a mangled, hopeless wreck of humanity sent back from the guns, a living protest against the horror of war. Suddenly someone would say, "The gostak distims the doshes!" and the poor wounded fragment would straighten up and put out his chest with pride, and an unquenchable fire would blaze in his eyes. He did not regret having given his all for that. How could I understand it?

And real it was when the draft was announced. More men were needed; volunteers were insufficient. Along with the rest, I complied with the order to register, doing so in a mechanical fashion, thinking little of it. Suddenly the coldest realization of the reality of it was flung at me when I was informed that my name had been drawn and that I would have to go!

All this time I had looked upon this mess as something outside of me, something belonging to a different world, of which I was not a part. Now here was a card summoning me to training camp. With all this death and mangled humanity in the background, I wasn't even interested in this world. I didn't belong here. To be called upon to undergo all the horrors of military life, the risk of a horrible death, for no reason at all! For a silly jumble of meaningless sounds.

I spent a sleepless night in maddened shock from the thing. In the morning a wild and haggard caricature of myself looked back at me from the mirror. But I had revolted. I intended to refuse service. If the words "conscientious objector" ever meant anything, I certainly was one. Even if they shot me for treason at once, that would be a fate less hard to bear than going out and giving my strength and my life for—for nothing at all.

My apprehensions were quite correct. With my usual success at self-control over a seething interior, I coolly walked to the draft office and informed them that I did not believe in their cause and could not see

my way to fight for it. Evidently they had suspected something of the sort already, for they had the irons on my wrists before I had hardly done with my speech.

"Period of emergency," said a beefy tyrant at the desk. "No time for stringing out a civil trial. Court-martial!"

He said it to me vindictively, and the guards jostled me roughly down the corridor; even they resented my attitude. The court-martial was already waiting for me. From the time I walked out of the lecture at the church I had been under secret surveillance, and they knew my attitude thoroughly. That is the first thing the president of the court informed me.

My trial was short. I was informed that I had no valid reason for objecting. Objectors because of religion, because of nationality and similar reasons, were readily understood; a jail sentence to the end of the war was their usual fate. But I admitted that I had no intrinsic objection to fighting; I merely jeered at their holy cause. That was treason unpardonable.

"Sentenced to be shot at sunrise!" the president of the court announced.

The world spun around with me. But only for a second. My self-control came to my aid. With the curious detachment that comes to us in such emergencies, I noted that the court-martial was being held in Professor Vibens's office—that dingy little Victorian room where I had first told my story of traveling by relativity and had first realized that I had come to the *t*-dimensional world. Apparently it was also to be the last room I was to see in this same world. I had no false hopes that the execution would help me back to my own world, as such things sometimes do in stories. When life is gone, it is gone, whether in one dimension or another. I would be just as dead in the *z* dimension as in the *t* dimension.

"Now, Einstein, or never!" I thought. "Come to my aid, O Riemann! O Lobachevski! If anything will save me it will have to be a tensor or a geodesic."

I said it to myself rather ironically. Relativity had brought me here. Could it get me out of this?

Well! Why not?

If the form of a natural law, yea, if a natural object varies with the observer who expresses it, might not the truth and the meaning of the

gostak slogan also be a matter of relativity? It was like making the moon ride the treetops again. If I could be a better relativist and put myself in these people's places, perhaps I could understand the gostak. Perhaps I would even be willing to fight for him or it.

The idea struck me suddenly. I must have straightened up and some bright change must have passed over my features, for the guards who led me looked at me curiously and took a firmer grip on me. We had just descended the steps of the building and had started down the walk.

Making the moon ride the treetops! That was what I needed now. And that sounded as silly to me as the gostak. And the gostak did not seem so silly. I drew a deep breath and felt very much encouraged. The viewpoint of *relativity* was somehow coming back to me. Necessity manages much. I could understand how one might fight for the idea of a gostak distimming the doshes. I felt almost like telling these men. Relativity is a wonderful thing. They led me up the slope, between the rows of poplars.

Then it all suddenly popped into my head: how I had gotten here by changing my coordinates, insisting to myself that I was going *upward*. Just like making the moon stop and making the trees ride when you are out riding at night. Now I was going upward. In my own world, in the z dimension, this same poplar was *down* the slope.

"It's downward!" I insisted to myself. I shut my eyes and imagined the building behind and *above* me. With my eyes shut, it did seem downward. I walked for a long time before opening them. Then I opened them and looked around.

I was at the end of the avenue of poplars. I was surprised. The avenue seemed short. Somehow it had become shortened; I had not expected to reach the end so soon. And where were the guards in olive uniforms? There were none.

I turned around and looked back. The slope extended on backward above me. I had indeed walked downward. There were no guards, and the fresh, new building was on the hill behind me.

Woleshensky stood on the steps.

"Now what do you think of a t dimension?" he called out to me.

Woleshensky!

And a *new* building, modern! Vibens's office was in an old Victorian building. What was there in common between Vibens and Woleshen-

sky? I drew a deep breath. The comforting realization spread gratefully over me that I was back in my native dimension. The gostak and the war were somewhere else. Here were peace and Woleshensky.

I hastened to pour out the story to him.

"What does it all mean?" I asked when I was through. "Somehow—vaguely—it seems that it ought to mean something."

"Perhaps," he said in his kind, sage way, "we really exist in four dimensions. A part of us and our world that we cannot see and are not conscious of projects on into another dimension, just like the front edges of the books in the bookcase, turned away from us. You know that the section of a conic cut by the y plane looks different from the section of the same conic cut by the z plane? Perhaps what you saw was our own world and our own selves intersected by a different set of coordinates. *Relativity,* as I told you in the beginning."

Isaac Asimov

WHAT IF . . .

To the reader of science fiction who knows Isaac Asimov as the author of such perceptive works of sociological imagination as the Foundation series, or the equally trail-blazing series about positronic robots, the following delicate and graceful fantasy will come as a real surprise. Likewise, the student who notes that Asimov is joint author of his college text on biochemistry will also be amazed at this bit of fanciful and fascinating conjecturing. But to those who know Asimov himself, nothing is impossible—particularly when they remember his famous contribution to basic research, "The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline," a study of time travel that really should have been included in this book. However, I refuse to pay royalties to one author twice. . . .

NORMAN and Livvy were late, naturally, since catching a train is always a matter of last-minute delays, so they had to take the only available seat in the coach. It was the one toward the front; the one with nothing before it but the seat that faced wrong way, with its back hard against the front partition. While Norman heaved the suitcase onto the rack, Livvy found herself chafing a little.

If a couple took the wrong-way seat before them, they would be staring self-consciously into each others' faces all the hours it would take to reach New York; or else, which was scarcely better, they would have to erect synthetic barriers of newspaper. Still, there was no use in taking a chance on there being another unoccupied double seat elsewhere in the train.

Norman didn't seem to mind, and that was a little disappointing to Livvy. Usually they held their moods in common. That, Norman claimed, was why he remained sure that he had married the right girl.

He would say, "We fit each other, Livvy, and that's the key fact. When you're doing a jigsaw puzzle and one piece fits another, that's it. There are no other possibilities, and of course there are no other girls."

And she would laugh and say, "If you hadn't been on the streetcar

that day, you would probably never have met me. What would you have done then?"

"Stayed a bachelor. Naturally. Besides, I would have met you through Georgette another day."

"It wouldn't have been the same."

"Sure it would."

"No, it wouldn't. Besides, Georgette would never have introduced me. She was interested in you herself, and she's the type who knows better than to create a possible rival."

"What nonsense."

Livvy asked her favorite question: "Norman, what if you had been one minute later at the streetcar corner and had taken the next car? What *do* you suppose would have happened?"

"And what if fish had wings and all of them flew to the top of the mountains? What would we have to eat on Fridays then?"

But they *had* caught the streetcar, and fish *didn't* have wings, so that now they had been married five years and ate fish on Fridays. And because they had been married five years, they were going to celebrate by spending a week in New York.

Then she remembered the present problem. "I wish we could have found some other seat."

Norman said, "Sure. So do I. But no one has taken it yet, so we'll have relative privacy as far as Providence, anyway."

Livvy was unconsoled, and felt herself justified when a plump little man walked down the central aisle of the coach. Now, where had he come from? The train was halfway between Boston and Providence, and if he had had a seat, why hadn't he kept it? She took out her vanity and considered her reflection. She had a theory that if she ignored the little man, he would pass by. So she concentrated on her light brown hair which, in the rush of catching the train, had become disarranged just a little; at her blue eyes, and at her little mouth with the plump lips which Norman said looked like a permanent kiss.

Not bad, she thought.

Then she looked up, and the little man was in the seat opposite. He caught her eye and grinned widely. A series of lines curled about the edges of his smile. He lifted his hat hastily and put it down beside him on top of the little black box he had been carrying. A circle of white hair instantly sprang up stiffly about the large bald spot that made the center of his skull a desert.

She could not help smiling back a little, but then she caught sight of the black box again and the smile faded. She yanked at Norman's elbow.

Norman looked up from his newspaper. He had startlingly dark eyebrows that almost met above the bridge of his nose, giving him a formidable first appearance. But they and the dark eyes beneath bent upon her now with only the usual look of pleased and somewhat amused affection.

He said, "What's up?" He did not look at the plump little man opposite.

Livvy did her best to indicate what she saw by a little unobtrusive gesture of her hand and head. But the little man was watching and she felt a fool, since Norman simply stared at her blankly.

Finally she pulled him closer and whispered, "Don't you see what's printed on his box?"

She looked again as she said it, and there was no mistake. It was not very prominent, but the light caught it slantingly and it was a slightly more glistening area on a black background. In flowing script it said, "What If."

The little man was smiling again. He nodded his head rapidly and pointed to the words and then to himself several times over.

Norman said in an aside, "Must be his name."

Livvy replied, "Oh, how could that be anybody's name?"

Norman put his paper aside. "I'll show you." He leaned over and said, "Mr. If?"

The little man looked at him eagerly.

"Do you have the time, Mr. If?"

The little man took out a large watch from his vest pocket and displayed the dial.

"Thank you, Mr. If," said Norman. And again in a whisper, "See, Livvy."

He would have returned to his paper, but the little man was opening his box and raising a finger periodically as he did so, to enforce their attention. It was just a slab of frosted glass that he removed—about six by nine inches in length and width and perhaps an inch thick. It had beveled edges, rounded corners, and was completely featureless. Then he took out a little wire stand on which the glass slab fitted comfortably. He rested the combination on his knees and looked proudly at them.

Livvy said, with sudden excitement, "Heavens, Norman, it's a picture of some sort."

Norman bent close. Then he looked at the little man. "What's this? A new kind of television?"

The little man shook his head, and Livvy said, "No, Norman, it's *us*."

"What?"

"Don't you see? That's the streetcar we met on. There you are in the back seat wearing that old fedora I threw away three years ago. And that's Georgette and myself getting on. The fat lady's in the way. Now! Can't you see us?"

He muttered, "It's some sort of illusion."

"But you see it too, don't you? That's why he calls this 'What If.' It will *show* us what if. What if the streetcar hadn't swerved . . ."

She was sure of it. She was very excited and very sure of it. As she looked at the picture in the glass slab, the late afternoon sunshine grew dimmer and the inchoate chatter of the passengers around and behind them began fading.

How she remembered that day. Norman knew Georgette and had been about to surrender his seat to her when the car swerved and threw Livvy into his lap. It was such a ridiculously corny situation, but it had worked. She had been so embarrassed that he was forced first into gallantry and then into conversation. An introduction from Georgette was not even necessary. By the time they got off the streetcar, he knew where she worked.

She could still remember Georgette glowering at her, sulkily forcing a smile when they themselves separated. Georgette said, "Norman seems to like you."

"Livvy replied, "Oh, don't be silly! He was just being polite. But he is nice-looking, isn't he?"

It was only six months after that that they married.

And now here was that same streetcar again, with Norman and herself and Georgette. As she thought that, the smooth train noises, the rapid clack-clack of the wheels, vanished completely. Instead, she was in the swaying confines of the streetcar. She had just boarded it with Georgette at the previous stop.

Livvy shifted weight with the swaying of the streetcar, as did forty others, sitting and standing, all to the same monotonous and rather

ridiculous rhythm. She said, "Somebody's motioning at you, George. Do you know him?"

"At me?" Georgette directed a deliberately casual glance over her shoulder. Her artificially long eyelashes flickered. She said, "I know him a little. What do you suppose he wants?"

"Let's find out," said Livvy. She felt pleased and a little wicked. Georgette had a well-known habit of hoarding her male acquaintances, and it was rather fun to annoy her this way. And besides, this one seemed quite . . . interesting.

She snaked past the line of standees, and Georgette followed without enthusiasm. It was just as Livvy arrived opposite the young man's seat that the streetcar lurched heavily as it rounded a curve. Livvy snatched desperately in the direction of the straps. Her fingertips caught and she held on. It was a long moment before she could breathe. For some reason, it had seemed that there were no straps close enough to be reached. Somehow, she felt that by all the laws of nature she should have fallen.

The young man did not look at her. He was smiling at Georgette and rising from his seat. He had astonishing eyebrows that gave him a rather competent and self-confident appearance. Livvy decided that she definitely liked him.

Georgette was saying, "Oh, no, don't bother. We're getting off in about two stops."

They did. Livvy said, "I thought we were going to Sach's."

"We are. There's just something I remember having to attend to here. It won't take but a minute."

"Next stop, Providence!" the loud-speakers were blaring. The train was slowing and the world of the past had shrunk itself into the glass slab once more. The little man was still smiling at them.

Livvy turned to Norman. She felt a little frightened. "Were you through all that, too?"

He said, "What happened to the time? We *can't* be reaching Providence yet?" He looked at his watch. "I guess we are." Then, to Livvy, "You didn't fall that time."

"Then you *did* see it?" She frowned, "Now, that's like Georgette. I'm sure there was no reason to get off the streetcar except to prevent my meeting you. How long had you known Georgette before then, Norman?"

"Not very long. Just enough to be able to recognize her at sight and to feel that I ought to offer her my seat."

Livvy curled her lip.

Norman grinned, "You can't be jealous of a might-have-been, kid. Besides, what difference would it have made? I'd have been sufficiently interested in you to work out a way of meeting you."

"You didn't even look at me."

"I hardly had the chance."

"Then how would you have met me?"

"Some way. I don't know how. But you'll admit this is a rather foolish argument we're having."

They were leaving Providence. Livvy felt a trouble in her mind. The little man had been following their whispered conversation, with only the loss of his smile to show that he understood. She said to him, "Can you show us more?"

Norman interrupted, "Wait now, Livvy. What are you going to try to do?"

She said, "I want to see our wedding day. What it would have been if I had caught the strap."

Norman was visibly annoyed. "Now, that's not fair. We might not have been married on the same day, you know."

But she said, "Can you show it to me, Mr. If?" and the little man nodded.

The slab of glass was coming alive again, glowing a little. Then the light collected and condensed into figures. A tiny sound of organ music was in Livvy's ears, without there actually being sound.

Norman said with relief, "Well, there I am. That's our wedding. Are you satisfied?"

The train sounds were disappearing again, and the last thing Livvy heard was her own voice saying, "Yes, there *you* are. But where am *I*?"

Livvy was well back in the pews. For a while she had not expected to attend at all. In the past months she had drifted further and further away from Georgette, without quite knowing why. She had heard of her engagement only through a mutual friend, and, of course, it was to Norman. She remembered very clearly that day, six months before, when she had first seen him on the streetcar. It was the time Georgette had so quickly snatched her out of sight. She had met him since on

several occasions, but each time Georgette was with him, standing between.

Well, she had no cause for resentment; the man was certainly none of hers. Georgette, she thought, looked more beautiful than she really was. And *he* was very handsome indeed.

She felt sad and rather empty, as though something had gone wrong—something that she could not quite outline in her mind. Georgette had moved up the aisle without seeming to see her, but earlier she had caught *his* eyes and smiled at him. Livvy thought he had smiled in return.

She heard the words distantly as they drifted back to her, "I now pronounce you—"

The noise of the train was back. A woman swayed down the aisle, herding a little boy back to their seats. There were intermittent bursts of girlish laughter from a set of four teen-age girls halfway down the coach. A conductor hurried past on some mysterious errand.

Livvy was frozenly aware of it all.

She sat there, staring straight ahead, while the trees outside blended into a fuzzy, furious green and the telephone poles galloped past.

She said, "It was *she* you married."

He stared at her for a moment and then one side of his mouth quirked a little. He said lightly, "I didn't really, Olivia. You're still my wife, you know. Just think about it for a few minutes."

She turned to him. "Yes, you married me—because I fell in your lap. If I hadn't, you would have married Georgette. If she hadn't wanted you, you would have married someone else. You would have married *anybody*. So much for your jigsaw-puzzle pieces."

Norman said very slowly, "Well—I'll—be—darned!" He put both hands to his head and smoothed down the straight hair over his ears where it had a tendency to tuft up. For the moment it gave him the appearance of trying to hold his head together. He said, "Now, look here, Livvy, you're making a silly fuss over a stupid magician's trick. You can't blame me for something I haven't done."

"You would have done it."

"How do you know?"

"You've seen it."

"I've seen a ridiculous piece of—of hypnotism, I suppose." His voice

suddenly raised itself into anger. He turned to the little man opposite. "Off with you, Mr. If, or whatever your name is. Get out of here. We don't want you. Get out before I throw your little trick out the window and you after it."

Livvy yanked at his elbow. "Stop it. *Stop it!* You're in a crowded train."

The little man shrank back into the corner of the seat as far as he could go and held his little black bag behind him. Norman looked at him, then at Livvy, then at the elderly lady across the way who was regarding him with patent disapproval.

He turned pink and bit back a pungent remark. They rode in frozen silence to and through New London.

Fifteen minutes past New London, Norman said, "Livvy!"

She said nothing. She was looking out the window but saw nothing but the glass.

He said again, "Livvy! Livvy! Answer me!"

She said dully, "What do you want?"

He said, "Look, this is all nonsense. I don't know how the fellow does it, but even granting it's legitimate, you're not being fair. Why stop where you did? Suppose I *had* married Georgette, do you suppose *you* would have stayed single? For all I know, you were already married at the time of my supposed wedding. Maybe that's why I married Georgette."

"I wasn't married."

"How do you know?"

"I would have been able to tell. I knew what my own thoughts were."

"Then you would have been married within the next year."

Livvy grew angrier. The fact that a sane remnant within her clamored at the unreason of her anger did not soothe her. It irritated her further, instead. She said, "And if I did, it would be no business of yours, certainly."

"Of course it wouldn't. But it would make the point that in the world of reality we can't be held responsible for the 'what ifs.'"

Livvy's nostrils flared. She said nothing.

Norman said, "Look! You remember the big New Year's celebration at Winnie's place year before last?"

"I certainly do. You spilled a keg of alcohol all over me."

"That's beside the point, and besides, it was only a cocktail shaker's worth. What I'm trying to say is that Winnie is just about your best friend and had been long before you married me."

"What of it?"

"Georgette was a good friend of hers too, wasn't she?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. You and Georgette would have gone to the party regardless of which one of you I had married. I would have had nothing to do with it. Let him show us the party as it would have been if I had married Georgette, and I'll bet you'd be there with either your fiancé or your husband."

Livvy hesitated. She felt honestly afraid of just that.

He said, "Are you afraid to take the chance?"

And that, of course, decided her. She turned on him furiously. "No, I'm not! And I hope I *am* married. There's no reason I should pine for you. What's more, I'd like to see what happens when you spill the shaker all over Georgette. She'll fill both your ears for you, and in public, too. I know *her*. Maybe you'll see a certain difference in the jigsaw pieces then." She faced forward and crossed her arms angrily and firmly across her chest.

Norman looked across at the little man, but there was no need to say anything. The glass slab was on his lap already. The sun slanted in from the west, and the white foam of hair that topped his head was edged with pink.

Norman said tensely, "Ready?"

Livvy nodded and let the noise of the train slide away again.

Livvy stood, a little flushed with recent cold, in the doorway. She had just removed her coat, with its sprinkling of snow, and her bare arms were still rebelling at the touch of open air.

She answered the shouts that greeted her with "Happy New Years" of her own, raising her voice to make herself heard over the squealing of the radio. Georgette's shrill tones were almost the first thing she heard upon entering, and now she steered toward her. She hadn't seen Georgette, or Norman, in weeks.

Georgette lifted an eyebrow, a mannerism she had lately cultivated, and said, "Isn't anyone with you, Olivia?" Her eyes swept the immediate surroundings and then returned to Livvy.

Livvy said indifferently, "I think Dick will be around later. There was something or other he had to do first." She felt as indifferent as she sounded.

Georgette smiled tightly. "Well, Norman's here. That ought to keep you from being lonely, dear. At least, it's turned out that way before."

And as she said so, Norman sauntered in from the kitchen. He had a cocktail shaker in his hand, and the rattling of ice cubes castanetted his words. "Line up, you rioting revelers, and get a mixture that will really revel your riots— Why Livvy!"

He walked toward her, grinning his welcome. "Where've you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you in twenty years, seems like. What's the matter? Doesn't Dick want anyone else to see you?"

"Fill my glass, Norman," said Georgette sharply.

"Right away," he said, not looking at her. "Do you want one too, Livvy? I'll get you a glass." He turned, and everything happened at once.

Livvy cried, "Watch out!" She saw it coming, even had a vague feeling that all this had happened before, but it played itself out inexorably. His heel caught the edge of the carpet; he lurched, tried to right himself, and lost the cocktail shaker. It seemed to jump out of his hands, and a pint of ice-cold liquor drenched Livvy from shoulder to hem.

She stood there, gasping. The noises muted about her, and for a few intolerable moments she made futile brushing gestures at her gown, while Norman kept repeating, "Damnation!" in rising tones.

Georgette said coolly, "It's too bad, Livvy. Just one of those things. I imagine the dress can't be very expensive."

Livvy turned and ran. She was in the bedroom, which was at least empty and relatively quiet. By the light of the fringe-shaded lamp on the dresser, she poked among the coats on the bed, looking for her own.

Norman had come in behind her. "Look, Livvy, don't pay any attention to what she said. I'm really devilishly sorry. I'll pay—"

"That's all right. It wasn't your fault." She blinked rapidly and didn't look at him. "I'll just go home and change."

"Are you coming back?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Look, Livvy . . ." His warm fingers were on her shoulders—

Livvy felt a queer tearing sensation deep inside her, as though she were ripping away from clinging cobwebs and—

—and the train noises were back.

Something *did* go wrong with the time when she was in there—in the slab. It was deep twilight now. The train lights were on. But it didn't matter. She seemed to be recovering from the wrench inside her.

Norman was rubbing his eyes with thumb and forefinger. "What happened?"

Livvy said, "It just ended. Suddenly."

Norman said uneasily, "You know, we'll be putting into New Haven soon." He looked at his watch and shook his head.

Livvy said wonderingly, "You spilled it on me."

"Well, so I did in real life."

"But in real life I was your wife. You ought to have spilled it on Georgette this time. Isn't that queer?" But she was thinking of Norman pursuing her; his hands on her shoulders. . . .

She looked up at him and said with warm satisfaction, "I wasn't married."

"No, you weren't. But was that Dick Reinhardt you were going around with?"

"Yes."

"You weren't planning to marry him, were you, Livvy?"

"Jealous, Norman?"

Norman looked confused. "Of that? Of a slab of glass? Of course not."

"I don't think I would have married him."

Norman said, "You know, I wish it hadn't ended when it did. There was something that was about to happen, I think." He stopped, then added slowly, "It was as though I would rather have done it to anybody else in the room."

"Even to Georgette."

"I wasn't giving two thoughts to Georgette. You don't believe me, I suppose."

"Maybe I do." She looked up at him. "I've been silly, Norman. Let's —let's live our real life. Let's not play with all the things that just might have been."

But he caught her hands. "No, Livvy. One last time. Let's see what

we would have been doing right now, Livvy! This very minute! If I had married Georgette."

Livvy was a little frightened. "Let's not, Norman." She was thinking of his eyes, smiling hungrily at her as he held the shaker, while Georgette stood beside her, unregarded. She didn't *want* to know what happened afterward. She just wanted this life now, this *good* life.

New Haven came and went.

Norman said again, "I want to try, Livvy."

She said, "If you want to, Norman." She decided fiercely that it wouldn't matter. Nothing would matter. Her hands reached out and encircled his arm. She held it tightly, and while she held it she thought: "Nothing in the make-believe can take him from me."

Norman said to the little man, "Set 'em up again."

In the yellow light the process seemed to be slower. Gently the frosted slab cleared, like clouds being torn apart and dispersed by an unfelt wind.

Norman was saying, "There's something wrong. That's just the two of us, exactly as we are now."

He was right. Two little figures were sitting in a train on the seats which were farthest toward the front. The field was enlarging now —they were merging into it. Norman's voice was distant and fading.

"It's the same train," he was saying. "The window in back is cracked just as—"

Livvy was blindingly happy. She said, "I wish we were in New York."

He said, "It will be less than an hour, darling." Then he said, "I'm going to kiss you." He made a movement, as though he were about to begin.

"Not here! Oh, Norman, people are looking."

Norman drew back. He said, "We should have taken a taxi."

"From Boston to New York?"

"Sure. The privacy would have been worth it."

She laughed. "You're funny when you try to act ardent."

"It isn't an act." His voice was suddenly a little somber. "It's not just an hour, you know. I feel as though I've been waiting five years."

"I do, too."

"Why couldn't I have met you first? It was such a waste."

"Poor Georgette," Livvy sighed.

Norman moved impatiently. "Don't be sorry for her, Livvy. We never really made a go of it. She was glad to get rid of me."

"I know that. That's why I say 'Poor Georgette.' I'm just sorry for her for not being able to appreciate what she had."

"Well, see to it that *you* do," he said. "See to it that you're immensely appreciative, infinitely appreciative—or more than that, see that you're at least half as appreciative as I am of what *I've* got."

"Or else you'll divorce me, too?"

"Over my dead body," said Norman.

Livvy said, "It's all so strange. I keep thinking: 'What if you hadn't spilt the cocktails on me that time at the party?' You wouldn't have followed me out; you wouldn't have told me; I wouldn't have known. It would have been so different . . . everything."

"Nonsense. It would have been just the same. It would have all happened another time."

"I wonder," said Livvy softly.

Train noises merged into train noises. City lights flickered outside, and the atmosphere of New York was about them. The coach was astir with travelers dividing the baggage among themselves.

Livvy was an island in the turmoil until Norman shook her.

She looked at him and said, "The jigsaw pieces fit after all."

He said, "Yes."

She put a hand on his. "But it wasn't good, just the same. I was very wrong. I thought that because we had each other, we should have all the *possible* each others. But all the possibles are none of our business. The real is enough. Do you know what I mean?"

He nodded.

She said, "There are millions of other *what ifs*. I don't want to know what happened in any of them. I'll never say 'What if' again."

Norman said, "Relax, dear. Here's your coat." And he reached for the suitcases.

Livvy said with sudden sharpness, "Where's Mr. If?"

Norman turned slowly to the empty seat that faced them. Together they scanned the rest of the coach.

"Maybe," Norman said, "he went into the next coach."

"But why? Besides, he wouldn't leave his hat." And she bent to pick it up.

Norman said, "What hat?"

And Livvy stopped, her fingers hovering over nothingness. She said,

"It was here—I almost touched it." She straightened and said, "Oh, Norman, what if—"

Norman put a finger on her mouth. "Darling . . ."

She said, "I'm sorry. Here, let me help you with the suitcases."

The train dived into the tunnel beneath Park Avenue, and the noise of the wheels rose to a roar.

John D. MacDonald

RING AROUND THE REDHEAD

In the search for adjectives to describe this item, I came up with "spine-tingling," "suspenseful," "action-packed." They all sounded somehow pale and uneventful. Therefore it is best to let Mr. MacDonald's yarn about a girl who never was born (on earth) and a murder that didn't happen give rise to its own adjectives in the reader's mind.

THE prosecuting attorney was a lean specimen named Amery Heater. The build-up given the murder trial by the newspapers had resulted in a welter of open-mouthed citizens who jammed the golden oak courtroom.

Bill Maloney, the defendant, was sleepy and bored. He knew he had no business being bored. Not with twelve righteous citizens who, under the spell of Amery Heater's quiet, confidential oratory were beginning to look at Maloney as though he were a fiend among fiends.

The August heat was intense, and flies buzzed around the upper sashes of the dusty windows. The city sounds drifted in the open windows, making it necessary for Amery Heater to raise his voice now and again.

But though Bill Maloney was bored, he was also restless and worried. Mostly he was worried about Justin Marks, his own lawyer.

Marks cared but little for this case. But, being Bill Maloney's best friend, he couldn't very well refuse to handle it. Justin Marks was a proper young man with a Dewey mustache and frequent daydreams about Justice Marks of the Supreme Court. He somehow didn't feel that the Maloney case was going to help him very much.

Particularly with the very able Amery Heater intent on getting the death penalty.

The judge was a puffy old citizen with signs of many good years at the brandy bottle, the hundreds of gallons of which, surprisingly, had done nothing to dim the keenness of eye or brain.

Bill Maloney was a muscular young man with a round face, a round chin, and a look of sleepy skepticism. A sheaf of his coarse, corn-

colored hair jutted out over his forehead. His eyes were clear, deep blue.

He stifled a yawn, remembering what Justin Marks had told him about making a good impression on the jury. He singled out a plump lady juror in the front row and winked solemnly at her. She lifted her chin with an audible sniff.

No dice there. Might as well listen to Amery Heater.

". . . . and we, the prosecution, intend to prove that on the evening of July tenth William Howard Maloney did murderously attack his neighbor, James Finch, and did kill James Finch by crushing his skull. We intend to prove there was a serious dispute between these men, a dispute that had continued for some time. We further intend to prove that the cause of this dispute was the dissolute life being led by the defendant."

Amery Heater droned on and on. The room was too hot. Bill Maloney slouched in his chair and yawned. He jumped when Justin Marks hissed at him. Then he remembered that he had yawned and he smiled placatingly at the jury. Several of them looked away hurriedly.

Fat little Dr. Koobie took the stand. He was sworn in, and Amery Heater, polite and respectful, asked questions which established Koobie's name, profession, and presence at the scene of the "murder" some fifty minutes after it had taken place.

"And now, Dr. Koobie, would you please describe in your own words exactly what you found."

Koobie hitched himself in his chair, pulled his trousers up a little over his chubby knees, and said, "No need to make this technical. I was standing out by the hedge between the two houses. I was on Jim Finch's side of the hedge. There was a big smear of blood around. Some of it was spattered on the hedge. Barberry, I think. On the ground there was some hunks of brain tissue, none of them bigger than a dime. Also a piece of scalp maybe two inches square. Had Jim's hair on it, all right. Proved that in the lab. Also found some pieces of bone. Not many." He smiled peacefully. "Guess old Jim is dead, all right. No question of that. Blood was his and the hair was his."

Three jurors swallowed visibly, and a fourth began to fan himself vigorously.

Koobie answered a few other questions, and then Justin Marks took over the cross-examination.

"What would you say killed Jim Finch?"

Many people gasped at the question, having assumed that the defense would be that, lacking a body, there was no murder.

Koobie put a fat finger in the corner of his mouth, took it out again. "Couldn't rightly say."

"Could a blow from a club or similar weapon have done it?"

"Good Lord, no! Man's head is a pretty durable thing. You'd have to back him up against a solid concrete wall and bust him with a full swing with a baseball bat and you still wouldn't do that much hurt. Jim was standing right out in the open."

"Dr. Koobie, imagine a pair of pliers ten feet long and proportionately thick. If a pair of pliers like that were to have grabbed Mr. Finch by the head, smashing it like a nut in a nutcracker, could it have done that much damage?"

Koobie pulled his nose, tugged on his ear, frowned, and said, "Why, if it clamped down real sudden like, I imagine it could. But where'd Jim go?"

"That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

Amery Heater called other witnesses. One of them was Anita Hempflet.

Amery said, "You live across the road from the defendant?"

Miss Anita Hempflet was fiftyish, big-boned, and of the same general consistency as the dried beef recommended for Canadian canoe trips. Her voice sounded like fingernails on the third-grade blackboard.

"Yes, I do. I've lived there thirty-five years. That Maloney person, him sitting right over there, moved in two years ago, and I must say that I . . ."

"You are able to see Mr. Maloney's house from your windows?"

"Certainly!"

"Now tell the court when it was that you first saw the redheaded woman."

She licked her lips. "I first saw that . . . that woman in May. A right pleasant morning it was, too. Or it was until I saw her. About ten o'clock, I'd say. She was right there in Maloney's front yard, as bold as brass. Had on some sort of shiny silver thing. You couldn't call it a dress. Too short for that. Didn't half cover her the way a lady ought to be covered. Not by half. She was . . ."

"What was she doing?"

"Well, she come out of the house and she stopped and looked around

as though she was surprised at where she was. My eyes are good. I could see her face. She looked all around. Then she sort of slouched, like she was going to keel over or something. She walked real slow down toward the gate. Mr. Maloney came running out of the house and I heard him yell to her. She stopped. Then he was making signs to her, for her to go back into the house. Just like she was deaf or something. After a while she went back in. I guessed she probably was made deaf by that awful bomb thing the government lost control of near town three days before that."

"You didn't see her again?"

"Oh, I saw her plenty of times. But after that she was always dressed more like a girl should be dressed. Far as I could figure out, Mr. Maloney was buying her clothes in town. It wasn't right that anything like that should be going on in a nice neighborhood. Mr. Finch didn't think it was right, either. Runs down property values, you know."

"In your knowledge, Miss Hempflet, did Mr. Maloney and the deceased ever quarrel?"

"They started quarreling a few days after that woman showed up. Yelling at each other across the hedge. Mr. Finch was always scared of burglars. He had that house fixed up so nobody could get in if he didn't want them in. A couple of times I saw Bill Maloney pounding on his door and rapping on the windows. Jim wouldn't pay any attention."

Justin cross-examined.

"You say, Miss Hempflet, that the defendant was going down and shopping for this woman, buying her clothes. In your knowledge, did he buy her anything else?"

Anita Hempflet sniggered. "Say so! Guess she must of been feebleminded. I asked around and found out he bought a blackboard and chalk and some kids' books."

"Did you make any attempt to find out where this woman came from, this woman who was staying with Mr. Maloney?"

"Should say I did! I know for sure that she didn't come in on the train or Dave Wattle would've seen her. If she'd come by bus, Myrtle Gisco would have known it. Johnny Farness didn't drive her in from the airport. I figure that any woman who'd live openly with a man like Maloney must have hitchhiked into town. She didn't come any other way."

"That's all, thank you," Justin Marks said.

Maloney sighed. He couldn't understand why Justin was looking so worried. Everything was going fine. According to plan. He saw the black looks the jury was giving him, but he wasn't worried. Why, as soon as they found out what had actually happened, they'd be all for him. Justin Marks seemed to be sweating.

He came back to the table and whispered to Bill, "How about temporary insanity?"

"I guess it's o.k. if you like that sort of thing."

"No. I mean as a plea!"

Maloney stared at him. "Justy, old boy, are you nuts? All we have to do is tell the truth."

Justin Marks rubbed his mustache with his knuckle and made a small bleating sound that acquired him a black look from the judge.

Amery Heater built his case up very cleverly and very thoroughly. In fact, the jury had Bill Maloney so definitely electrocuted that they were beginning to give him sad looks—full of pity.

It took Amery Heater two days to complete his case. When it was done, it was a solid and shining structure, every discrepancy explained, everything pinned down. Motive. Opportunity. Everything.

On the morning of the third day the court was tense with expectancy. The defense was about to present its case. No one knew what the case was, except, of course, Bill Maloney, Justin Marks, and the unworldly redhead who called herself Rejapachalandakeena. Bill called her Keena. She hadn't appeared in court.

Justin Marks stood up and said to the hushed court, "Your Honor. Rather than summarize my defense at this point, I would like to put William Maloney on the stand first and let him tell the story in his own words."

The court buzzed. Putting Maloney on the stand would give Amery Heater a chance to cross-examine. Heater would rip Maloney to tiny shreds. The audience licked its collective chops.

"Your name?"

"William Maloney, 12 Braydon Road."

"And your occupation?"

"Tinkering. Research, if you want a fancy name."

"Where do you get your income?"

"I've got a few gimmicks patented. The royalties come in."

"Please tell the court all you know about this crime of which you are accused. Start at the beginning, please."

Bill Maloney shoved the blond hair back off his forehead with a square, mechanic's hand and smiled cheerfully at the jury. Some of them, before they realized it, had smiled back. They felt the smiles on their lips and sobered instantly. It wasn't good form to smile at a vicious murderer.

Bill slouched in the witness chair and laced his fingers across his stomach.

"It all started," he said, "the day the Army let that rocket get out of hand on the seventh of May. I've got my shop in my cellar. Spend most of my time down there.

"That rocket had an atomic warhead, you know. I guess they've busted fifteen generals over that affair so far. It exploded in the hills forty miles from town. The jar upset some of my apparatus and stuff. Put it out of kilter. I was sore.

"I turned around, cussing away to myself, and where my coal bin used to be, there was a room. The arch leading into the room was wide and I could see in. I tell you, it really shook me up to see that room there. I wondered for a minute if the bomb hadn't given me delusions.

"The room I saw didn't have any furniture in it. Not like furniture we know. It had some big cubes of dull silvery metal, and some smaller cubes. I couldn't figure out the lighting.

"Being a curious cuss, I walked right through the arch and looked around. I'm a great one to handle things. The only thing in the room I could pick up was a gadget on top of the biggest cube. It hardly weighed a thing.

"In order to picture it, you've got to imagine a child's hoop made of silvery wire. Then right across the wire imagine the blackest night you've ever seen, rolled out into a thin sheet and stretched tight like a drumhead on that wire hoop.

"As I was looking at it I heard some sort of deep vibration, and there I was, stumbling around in my coal bin. The room was gone. But I had that darn hoop in my hand. That hoop with the midnight stretched across it.

"I took it back across to my workbench where the light was better. I held it in one hand and poked a finger at that black stuff. My finger went right through. I didn't feel a thing. With my finger still sticking through it, I looked on the other side.

"It was right there that I named the darn thing. I said, 'Gawk!' And that's what I've called it ever since. The gawk. My finger didn't come through on the other side. I stuck my whole arm through. No arm. I pulled it back out. Quick. Arm was O.K. Somehow it seemed warmer on the other side of the gawk.

"Well, you can imagine what it was like for me, a tinkerer, to get my hands on a thing like that. I forgot all about meals and so on. I had to find out what it was and why. I couldn't see my own hand on the other side of it. I put it right up in front of my face, reached through from the back and tried to touch my nose. I couldn't do it. I reached so deep that without the gawk there, my arm would have been halfway through my head. . . ."

"Objection!" Amery Heater said. "All this has nothing to do with the fact. . . ."

"My client," Justin said, "is giving the incidents leading up to the alleged murder."

"Overruled," the judge said.

Maloney said, "Thanks. I decided that my arm had to be someplace when I stuffed it through the gawk. And it wasn't in this dimension. Maybe not even in this time. But it had to be someplace. That meant that I had to find out what was on the other side of the gawk. I could use touch, sight. Maybe I could climb through. It intrigued me, you might say.

"I started with touch. I put my hand through, held it in front of me, and walked. I walked five feet before my hand rammed up against something. I felt it. It seemed to be a smooth wall. There wasn't such a wall in my cellar.

"There has to be some caution in science. I didn't stuff my head through. I couldn't risk it. I had the hunch there might be something unfriendly on the other side of the gawk. I turned the thing around and stuck my hand through from the other side. No wall. There was a terrific pain. I yanked my hand back. A lot of little bloodvessels near the surface had broken. I dropped the gawk and jumped around for a while. Found out I had a bad case of frostbite. The broken blood vessels indicated that I had stuffed my hand into a vacuum. Frostbite in a fraction of a second indicated nearly absolute zero. It seemed that maybe I had put my hand into space. It made me glad it had been my hand instead of my head.

"I propped the thing up on my bench and shoved lots of things through, holding them a while and bringing them back out. Made a lot of notes on the effect of absolute zero on various materials.

"By that time I was bushed. I went up to bed. Next day I had some coffee and then built myself a little periscope. Shoved it through. Couldn't see a thing. I switched the gawk, tested with a thermometer, put my hand through. Warm enough. But the periscope didn't show me a thing. I wondered if maybe something happened to light rays when they went through that blackness. Turns out that I was right.

"By about noon I had found out another thing about it. Every time I turned it around I was able to reach through into a separate and distinct environment. I tested that with the thermometer. One of the environments I tested slammed the mercury right out through the top of the glass and broke the glass and burned my hand. I was glad I hadn't hit that one the first time. It would have burned my hand off at the wrist.

"I began to keep a journal of each turn of the gawk and what seemed to be on the other side of it. I rigged up a jig on my workbench and began to grope through the gawk with my fireplace tongs.

"Once I jabbed something that seemed to be soft and alive. Those tongs were snatched right through the gawk. Completely gone. It gave me the shudders, believe me. If it had been my hand instead of the tongs, I wouldn't be here. I have a hunch that whatever snatched those tongs would have been glad to eat me.

"I rigged up some grappling hooks and went to work. Couldn't get anything. I put a lead weight on some cord and lowered it through. Had some grease on the end of the weight. When the cord slacked off, I pulled it back up. There was fine yellow sand on the bottom of the weight. And I had lowered it thirty-eight feet before I hit sand.

"On try number two hundred and eight, I brought an object back through the gawk. Justy has it right there in his bag. Show it to the people, Justy."

Justin looked annoyed at the informal request, but he unstrapped the bag and took out an object. He passed it up to the judge who looked at it with great interest. Then it was passed through the jury. It ended up on the table in front of the bench, tagged as an exhibit.

"You can see, folks, that such an object didn't come out of our civilization."

"Objection!" Heater yelled. "The defendant could have made it."

"Hush up!" the judge said.

"Thanks. As you can see, that object is a big crystal. That thing in the crystal is a golden scorpion, about five times life size. The corner is sawed off there because Jim Finch sawed it off. You notice that he sawed off a big enough piece to get a hunk of the scorpion's leg. Jim told me that leg was solid gold. That whole bug is solid gold. I guess it was an ornament in some other civilization.

"Now that gets me around to Jim Finch. As you all know, Jim retired from the jewelry business about five years ago. Jim was a pretty sharp trader. You know how he parlayed his savings across the board so that he owned a little hunk of just about everything in town. He was always after me to let him in on my next gimmick. I guess those royalty checks made his mouth water. We weren't what you'd call friends. I passed the time of day with him, but he wasn't a friendly man.

"Anyway, when I grabbed this bug out of the gawk, I thought of Jim Finch. I wanted to know if such a thing could be made by a jeweler. Jim was home and his eyes popped when he saw it. You know how he kept that little shop in his garage and made presents for people? Well, he cut off a section with a saw. Then he said that he'd never seen anything like it and he didn't know how on earth it was put together. I told him that it probably wasn't put together on earth. That teased him a little, and he kept after me until I told him the whole story. He didn't believe it. That made me mad. I took him over into my cellar and showed him a few things. I set the gawk between two boxes so it was parallel to the floor, then dropped my grapples down into it. In about three minutes I caught something and brought it up. It seemed to be squirming."

Maloney drew a deep breath. "That made me a shade cautious. I brought it up slow. The head of the thing came out. It was like a small bear—but more like a bear that had been made into a rug. Flat like a leech, and instead of front legs it just seemed to have a million little sucker disks around the flat edge. It screamed so hard, with such a high note, that it hurt my ears. I dropped it back through.

"When I looked around, old Jim was backed up against the cellar wall, mumbling. Then he got down on his hands and knees and patted the floor under the gawk. He kept right on mumbling. Pretty soon he asked me how that bear-leech and that golden bug could be in the same place. I explained how I had switched the gawk. We played around for a while and then came up with a bunch of stones.

Jim handled them, and his eyes started to pop out again. He began to shake. He told me that one of the stones was an uncut ruby. You couldn't prove it by me. It would've made you sick to see the way old Jim started to drool. He talked so fast I could hardly understand him. Finally I got the drift. He wanted us to go in business and rig up some big machinery so we could dig through the gawk and come back with all kinds of things. He wanted bushels of rubies and a few tons of gold.

"I told him I wasn't interested. He got so mad he jumped up and down. I told him I was going to fool around with the thing for a while and then I was going to turn it over to some scientific foundation so the boys could go at it in the right way.

"He looked mad enough to kill me. He told me we could have castles and cars and yachts and a million bucks each. I told him that the money was coming in faster than I could spend it already, and all I wanted was to stay in my cellar and tinker.

"I told him that I guessed the atomic explosion had dislocated something, and the end product belonged to science. I also told him very politely to get the devil home and stop bothering me.

"He did, but he sure hated to leave. Well, by the morning of the tenth, I had pretty well worn myself out. I was bushed and jittery from no sleep. I had made twenty spins in a row without getting anything, and I had begun to think I had run out of new worlds on the other side of the gawk.

"Like a darn fool, I yanked it off the jig, took it like a hoop and scaled it across the cellar. It went high, then dropped lightly, spinning.

"And right there in my cellar was this beautiful redhead. She was dressed in a shiny silver thing. Justy's got that silver thing in his bag. Show it to the people. You can see that it's made out of some sort of metal mesh, but it isn't cold like metal would be. It seems to hold heat and radiate it."

The metal garment was duly passed around. Everybody felt of it, exclaimed over it. This was better than a movie. Maloney could see from Amery Heater's face that the man wanted to claim the metal garment was also made in the Maloney cellar.

Bill winked at him. Amery Heater flushed a dull red.

"Well, she stood there, right in the middle of the gawk which was flat against the floor. She had a dazed look on her face. I asked her where she had come from. She gave me a blank look and a stream of

her own language. She seemed mad about something. And pretty upset.

"Now what I should have done was pick up that gawk and lift it back up over her head. That would have put her back in her own world. But she stepped out of it, and like a darn fool I stood and held it and spun it, nervous like. In spinning it, I spun her own world off into some mathematical equation I couldn't figure.

"It was by the worst or the best kind of luck, depending on how you look at it, that I made a ringer on her when I tossed the gawk across the cellar. Her make-up startled me a little. No lipstick. Tiny crimson beads on the end of each eyelash. Tiny emerald-green triangles painted on each tooth in some sort of enamel. Nicely centered. Her hairdo wasn't any wackier than some you see every day.

"Well, she saw the gawk in my hands and she wasn't dumb at all. She came at me, her lips trembling, her eyes pleading, and tried to step into it. I shook my head, hard, and pushed her back and set it back in the jig. I shoved a steel rod through, holding it in asbestos mittens. The heat beyond the blackness turned the whole rod cherry red in seconds. I shoved it on through the rest of the way, then showed her the darkened mitten. She was quick. She got the most horrified look on her face.

"Then she ran upstairs, thinking it was some sort of joke, I guess. I noticed that she slammed right into the door, as though she expected it to open for her. By the time I got to her, she had figured out the knob. She went down the walk toward the gate.

"That's when nosy Anita must have seen her. I shouted and she turned around and the tears were running right down her face. I made soothing noises, and she let me lead her back into the house. I've never seen a prettier girl or one stacked any . . . I mean her skin is translucent, sort of. Her eyes are enormous. And her hair is a shade of red that you never see.

"She had no place to go and she was my responsibility. I certainly didn't feel like turning her over to the welfare people. I fixed her up a place to sleep in my spare room and I had to show her everything. How to turn on a faucet. How to turn the lights off and on.

"She didn't do anything except cry for four days. I gave her food that she didn't eat. She was a mess. Worried me sick. I didn't have any idea how to find her world again. No idea at all. Of course, I could have popped her into any old world, but it didn't seem right.

"On the fourth day I came up out of the cellar and found her sitting in a chair looking at a copy of *See* magazine. She seemed very much interested in the pictures of the women. She looked up at me and smiled. That was the day I went into town and came back with a mess of clothes for her. I had to show her how a zipper worked and how to button a button."

He looked as if that might have been fun.

"After she got all dressed up, she smiled some more, and that evening she ate well. I kept pointing to things and saying the right name for them.

"I tell you, once she heard the name for something, she didn't forget it. It stayed right with her. Nouns were easy. The other words were tough. About ten that night I finally caught her name. It was Rejapachalandakeena. She seemed to like to have me call her Keena. The first sentence she said was, 'Where is Keena?'

"That is one tough question. Where is here and now? Where is this world, anyway? On what side of what dimension? In which end of space? On what twisted convolution of the time stream? What good is it to say, 'This is the world'? It just happens to be our world. Now I know that there are plenty of others.

"Writing came tougher for her than the sounds of the words. She showed me her writing. She took a piece of paper, held the pencil pointing straight up, and put the paper on top of the rug. Then she worked that pencil like a pneumatic hammer, starting at the top right corner and going down the page. I couldn't figure it until she read it over and made a correction by sticking in one extra hole in the paper. I saw then that the pattern of holes was very precise—like notes on a sheet of music.

"She went through the grade school readers like a flash. I was buying her some arithmetic books one day, and when I got back she said, 'Man here while Billy gone.' She was calling me Billy. 'Keena hide,' she said.

"Well, the only thing missing was the gawk, and with it Keena's chance to make a return to her own people. I thought immediately of Jim Finch. I ran over and pounded on his door. He undid the chain so he could talk to me through a five-inch crack, but I couldn't get in. I asked him if he had stolen the little item. He told me that I'd better run to the police and tell them exactly what it was that I had lost, and then I could tell the police exactly how I got it. I could tell by the look

of naked triumph in his eyes that he had it. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

"Keena's English improved by leaps and bounds, and pretty soon she was dipping into my texts on chemistry and physics. She seemed puzzled. She told me that we were like her people a few thousand years back. Primitives. She told me a lot about her world. No cities. The houses are far apart. No work. Everyone is assigned to a certain cultural pursuit, depending on basic ability. She was a designer. In order to train herself, she had had to learn the composition of all fabricated materials used in her world.

"I took notes while she talked. When I get out of this jam I'm going to revolutionize the plastics industry. She seemed bright enough to be able to take in the story of how she suddenly appeared in my cellar. I gave it to her slow and easy.

"When I was through, she sat very still for a long time. Then she told me that some of the most brilliant men of her world had long ago found methods of seeing into other worlds beyond their own. They had borrowed things from worlds more advanced than their own and had thus been able to avoid mistakes in the administration of their own world. She told me that it was impossible that her departure should go unnoticed. She said that probably at the moment of her disappearance, all the resources of a great people were being concentrated on that spot where she had been standing talking to some friends. She told me that some trace of the method would be found and that they would then scan this world, locate her, and take her back.

"I asked her if it would be easier if we had the gawk, and she said that it wasn't necessary, and that if it was, she would merely go next door and see Jim Finch face to face. She said she had a way, once she looked into his eyes, of taking over the control of his involuntary muscles and stopping his heartbeat.

"I gasped, and she smiled sweetly and said that she had very nearly done it to me when I had kept her from climbing back through the gawk. She said that everybody in her world knew how to do that. She also said that most adults knew how to create, out of imagination, images that would respond to physical tests. To prove it she stared at the table. In a few seconds a little black box slowly appeared out of misty nothingness. She told me to look at it. I picked it up. It was latched. I opened it. Her picture smiled out at me. She was standing before the entrance of a white castle that seemed to reach to the clouds.

"Suddenly it was gone. She explained that when she stopped thinking of it, it naturally disappeared, because that was what had caused it. Her thinking. I asked her why she didn't think up a doorway to her own world and then step through it while she was still thinking about it. She said that she could only think up things by starting with their basic physical properties and working up from there, like a potter starts with clay.

"So I stopped heckling Jim Finch about that time. I was sorry, because I wanted the gawk back. Best toy I'd ever had. Once I got a look in Jim's garage window. He'd forgot to pull the shade down all the way. He had the gawk rigged up on a stand and had a big arm, like the bucket on a steam shovel, rigged up, only just big enough to fit through the hoop. He wasn't working it when I saw him. He was digging up the concrete in the corner of his cellar. He was using a pick and he had a shovel handy. He was pale as death. I saw then that he had a human arm in there on the floor and blood all over. The bucket was rigged with jagged teeth. It didn't take much imagination to figure out what Jim had done.

"Some poor innocent character in one of those other worlds had had a massive contraption come out of nowhere and chaw his arm off. I thought of going to the police, and then I thought of how easy it would be for Jim Finch to get me stuck away in a padded cell while he stayed on the outside, all set to pull more arms off more people."

Heater glanced uneasily at the jury. They were drinking it in.

"I told Keena about it and she smiled. She told me that Jim was digging into many worlds and that some of them were pretty advanced. I gradually got the idea that old Jim was engaging in as healthy an occupation as a small boy climbing between the bars and tickling the tigers. I began to worry about old Jim a little. You all know about that couple of bushels of precious stones that were found in his house. That's what made him tickle the tigers. But the cops didn't find that arm. I guess that after he got the hole dug, Jim got over his panic and realized that all he had to do was switch the gawk around and toss the arm through. Best place for old razor blades I ever heard of.

"Well, as May turned into June and June went by, Keena got more and more confident of her eventual rescue. As I learned more about her world, I got confident of it too. In a few thousand years we may be as bright as those people. I hope we are. No wars, no disease.

"And the longer she stayed with me, the more upset I got about her leaving me. But it was what she wanted. I guess it's what I'd want if somebody shoved me back a thousand years B.C. I'd want to get home, but quick.

"On the tenth of July I got a phone call from Jim Finch. His voice was all quavery like a little old lady. He said, 'Maloney, I want to give that thing back to you. Right away.' Anything Jim Finch gave anybody was a spavined gift horse. I guessed that the gobblies were after him like Keena had hinted.

"So I just laughed at him. Maybe I laughed to cover up the fact that I was a little scared, too. What if some world he messed with dropped a future-type atomic bomb back through the gawk into his lap? I told him to burn it up if he was tired of it.

"I didn't know Jim could cuss like that. He said that it wouldn't burn and he couldn't break it or destroy it any way. He said that he was coming out and throw it across the hedge into my yard right away.

"As I got to my front door, he came running out of his house. He carried the thing like it was going to blow up.

"Just as he got to the hedge, I saw a misty circle in the air over his head. Only it was about ten feet across. A pair of dark blue shiny pliers with jaws as big as the judge's desk there swooped down and caught him by the head. The jaws snapped shut so hard that I could hear sort of a thick, wet, popping sound as all the bones in old Jim's head gave way all at once.

"He dropped the gawk and hung limp in those closed jaws for a moment, then he was yanked up through that misty circle into nothingness. Gone. Right before my eyes. The misty circle drifted down to grass level and then faded away. The gawk faded right away with it. You know what it made me think of? Of a picnic where you're trying to eat, and a bug gets on your arm and bothers you. You pinch it between your thumb and forefinger, roll it once, and throw it away. Old Jim was just about as important to those blue steel jaws as a hungry red ant is to you or me. You could call those gems he got crumbs, I guess.

"I was just getting over being sick in my own front yard when Timmy came running over, took one look at the blood, and ran back. The police came next. That's all there is to tell. Keena is still around and Justy will bring her in to testify tomorrow."

Bill Maloney yawned and smiled at the jury.

Amery Heater got up, stuck his thumbs inside his belt, and walked slowly and heavily over to Bill.

He stared into Bill's smiling face for ten long seconds. Bill shuffled his feet and began to look uncomfortable.

In a low, bitter tone Amery Heater said, "Gawks! Golden scorpions! Tangential worlds! Blue jaws!" He sighed heavily, pointed to the jury, and said, "Those are intelligent people, Maloney. No questions!"

The judge had to pound with his gavel to quiet the court. As soon as the room was quiet, he called an adjournment until ten the following morning.

When Bill Maloney was brought out of his cell into court the next morning, the jurors gave each other wise looks. It was obvious that the young man had spent a bad night. There were puffy areas under his eyes. He scuffed his heels as he walked, sat down heavily, and buried his face in his hands. They wondered why his shoulders seemed to shake.

Justin Marks looked just as bad. Or worse.

Bill was sunk in a dull lethargy, in an apathy so deep that he didn't know where he was and cared less.

Justin Marks stood up and said, "Your Honor, we request an adjournment of the case for twenty-four hours."

"For what reason?"

"Your honor, I intended to call the woman known as Keena to the stand this morning. She was in a room at the Hotel Hollyfield. Last night she went up to her room at eleven after I talked with her in the lounge. She hasn't been seen since. Her room is empty. All her possessions are there, but she is gone. I would like time to locate her, your Honor."

The judge looked extremely disappointed.

He pursed his lips and said in a sweet tone, "You are sure that such a woman actually exists, Counselor?"

Justin Marks turned pale, and Amery Heater chuckled.

"Of course, your Honor! Why, only last night . . ."

"Her people came and got her," Bill Maloney said heavily. He didn't look up. The jury shifted restlessly. They had expected to be entertained by a gorgeous redhead. Without her testimony, the story related by Maloney seemed even more absurd than it had seemed when they had heard it. Of course, it would be a shame to electrocute a nice clean young man like that, but really you can't have people going about kill-

ing their neighbors and then concocting such a fantasy about it. . . .

"What's that?" the judge asked suddenly.

It began as a hum, so low as to be more of a vibration than a sound. A throb that seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Slowly it increased in pitch and in violence, and if the judge had any more to say on the subject, no one heard him. He appeared to be trying to beat the top of his desk in with the gavel. But the noise couldn't be heard.

Slowly climbing up the audible range, it filled the court. As it passed the index of vibration of the windows, they shattered, but the falling glass couldn't be heard. A man who had been wearing glasses stared through empty frames.

The sound passed beyond the upper limits of the human ear, became hypersonic, and every person in the courtroom was suddenly afflicted with a blinding headache.

It stopped as abruptly as a scream in the night.

For a moment there was a misty arch in the solid wall. Beyond it was the startling vagueness of a line of blue hills. Hills that didn't belong there.

She came quickly through the arch. It faded. She was not tall, but gave the impression of tallness. Her hair was the startling red of port wine, her skin so translucent as to seem faintly bluish. Her eyes were halfway between sherry and honey. Tiny crimson beads were on the tip of each eyelash. Her warm full lips were parted, and they could all see the little green enameled triangles on her white teeth. Her single garment was like the silver metallic garment they had touched. But it was golden. Without any apparent means of support, it clung to her lovely body, following each line and curve.

She looked around the court. Maloney's eyes were warm blue fire. "Keena!" he gasped. She ran to him, threw herself on him, her arms around his neck, her face hidden in the line of jaw, throat, and shoulder. He murmured things to her that the jury strained to hear.

Amery Heater, feeling his case fade away, was the first to recover.

"Hypnotism!" he roared.

It took the judge a full minute of steady pounding to silence the spectators. "One more disturbance like this, and I'll clear the court," he said.

Maloney had come to life. She sat on his lap and they could hear her say, "What are they trying to do to you?"

He smiled peacefully. "They want to kill me, honey. They say I killed Jim Finch."

She turned and her eyes shriveled the jury and the judge.

"Stupid!" she hissed.

There was a little difficulty swearing her in. Justin Marks, his confidence regained, thoroughly astonished at finding that Bill Maloney had been telling the truth all along, questioned Keena masterfully. She backed up Maloney's story in every particular. Maloney couldn't keep his eyes off her. Her accent was odd, and her voice had a peculiar husky and yet liquid quality.

Justin Marks knuckled his mustache proudly, bowed to Amery Heater, and said, "Do you wish to cross-examine?"

Heater nodded, stood up, and walked over slowly. He gave Keena a long and careful look. "Young woman, I congratulate you on your acting ability. Where did you get your training? Surely you've been on the stage."

"Stage?"

"Oh, come now! All this has been very interesting, but now we must discard this dream world and get down to facts. What is your real name?"

"Rejapachalandakeena."

Heater sighed heavily. "I see that you are determined to maintain your silly little fiction. That entrance of yours was somehow engineered by the defendant, I am sure." He turned and smiled at the jury—the smile of a fellow conspirator.

"Miss So-and-so, the defense has all been based on the idea that you come from some other world, or some hidden corner of time, or out of the woodwork. I think that what you had better do is just prove to us that you do come from some other world." His voice dripped with sarcasm. "Just do one or two things for us that we common mortals can't do, please."

Keena frowned, propped her chin on her fist. After a few moments she said, "I do not know completely what you are able to do. Many primitive peoples have learned through a sort of intuition. Am I right in thinking that those people behind that little fence are the ones who decide whether my Billy is to be killed?"

"Correct."

She turned and stared at the jury for a long time. Her eyes passed from face to face, slowly. The jurors were oddly uncomfortable.

She said, "It is very odd. That woman in the second row. The second one from the left. It is odd that she should be there. Not very long ago she gave a poison, some sort of vegetable-base poison, to her husband. He was sick for a long time and he died. Is that not against your silly laws?"

The woman in question turned pale green, put her hands to her throat, rolled her eyes up, and slid quietly off the chair. No one made a move to help her. All eyes were on Keena.

Some woman back in the courtroom said shrilly, "I knew there was something funny about the way Dave died! I knew it! Arrest Mrs. Watson immediately!"

Keena's eyes turned toward the woman who had spoken. The woman sat down suddenly.

Keena said, "This man you call Dave. His wife killed him because of you. I can read that in your eyes."

Amery Heater chuckled. "A very good trick, but pure imagination. I rather guess you have been prepared for this situation, and my opponent has briefed you on what to do should I call on you in this way."

Keena's eyes flashed. She said, "You are a most offensive person."

She stared steadily at Amery Heater. He began to sweat. Suddenly he screamed and began to dance about. Smoke poured from his pockets. Blistering his fingers, he threw pocketknife, change, money clip on the floor. They glowed dull red, and the smell of scorching wood filled the air.

A wisp of smoke rose from his tie clip, and he tore that off, sucking his blistered fingers. The belt buckle was next. By then the silver coins had melted against the wooden floor. But there was one last thing he had to remove. His shoes. The eyelets were metal. They began to burn the leather.

At last, panting and moaning, he stood surrounded by the cherry-red pieces of metal on the floor.

Keena smiled and said softly, "Ah, you have no more metal on you. Would you like to have further proof?"

Amery Heater swallowed hard. He looked up at the openmouthed judge. He glanced at the jury.

"The prosecution withdraws," he said hoarsely.

The judge managed to close his mouth.

"Case dismissed," he said. "Young woman, I suggest you go back wherever you came from."

She smiled blandly up at him. "Oh, no! I can't go back. I went back once and found that my world was very empty. They laughed at my new clothes. I said I wanted Billy. They said they would transport him to my world. But Billy wouldn't be happy there. So I came back."

Maloney stood up, yawned, and stretched. He smiled at the jury. Two men were helping the woman back up into her chair. She was still green.

He winked at Keena and said, "Come on home, honey."

They walked down the aisle together and out the golden oak doors. Nobody made a sound or a move to stop them.

Anita Hempflet, extremely conscious of the fact that the man who had left her waiting at the altar thirty-one years before was buried just beyond the corn hills in her vegetable garden, forced her razor lips into a broad smile, beamed around at the people sitting near her, and said in her high, sharp voice, "Well! That girl is going to make a lovely neighbor! If you folks will excuse me, I'm going to take her over some fresh strawberry preserves."

Alan E. Nourse

TIGER BY THE TAIL

One of the fascinating things about dimension stories is the fact that events can be described that are so completely different from anything ever imagined before that a sense of shocked pleasure arises from their very novelty. This tale about a bottomless purse will give you just that feeling of startled delight, if you are correctly attuned.

THE department store was so crowded with the postseason rush, it was surprising that they spotted her at all. The salesgirl at the counter was busy at the far end, and the woman was equally busy at her own end, slipping goods from the counter into the large black purse. Kearney watched for several minutes in growing alarm before he motioned over the other section manager.

"Watch that woman for a minute," he said in an offhand whisper. "She's sorting that hardware like she owns the store!"

"A klepto? What are you waiting for?" asked the other. "Let's have a talk with her—"

Kearney scratched his head. "Watch her for a moment. There's something damned fishy—"

They watched. She was standing at the kitchenware counter, her hands running over the merchandise on the shelf. She took three cookie cutters and popped them into the pocketbook. Two large cake tins and a potato masher followed. Then a small cake safe and two small pots. Then a large aluminum skillet.

The second man stared in disbelief. "She's taken enough junk there to stock a store. And she's putting it all into that pocketbook. Kearney, *she couldn't get all that junk into a pocketbook!*"

"I know," said Kearney. "Let's go."

They moved in on her from opposite sides, and Kearney took her gently by the arm. "We'd like to speak to you, madam. Please come with us quietly."

She looked up blankly, then shrugged and followed them into a small office. "I don't know what this means—"

"We've been watching you for fifteen minutes." Kearney took the

pocketbook from her arm, unsnapped it, glanced inside, and shook it in alarm.

He looked up, eyes wide and puzzled. "Jerry, *look at this.*"

Jerry looked. When he tried to speak, there just weren't any words. The pocketbook was empty.

Frank Collins parked his car in front of the Institute of Physics, and was passed by fingerprint into the lab wing. Evanson met him in the corridor.

"Glad you got here," Evanson said grimly.

"Listen, John, what *is* this about a pocketbook? I hope it's not your idea of a joke."

"Not this gadget," Evanson promised. "Wait till you see it."

He led the way into one of the large lab sections. Collins eyed the shiny control panels uneasily, the giant generators and boosters, the duocalc relay board with its gleaming tubes and confused wiring. "I can't see what you want with me here. I'm a mechanical engineer."

Evanson walked into a small office off the lab. "You're also a trouble shooter from way back. Meet the research team, Frank."

The research team wore smocks, glasses, and a slouch. Collins nodded, and looked at the pocketbook lying on the table.

"Looks just like any other pocketbook to me," he said. He picked it up. It felt like a pocketbook. "What's in it?"

"You tell us," Evanson said.

Collins opened it up. It was curiously dark inside, with a dull metallic ring around the inside, near the top. He turned it upside down and shook it. Nothing came out.

"Don't reach around inside," Evanson cautioned. "It's not safe. One fellow tried, and lost a wrist watch."

Collins looked up, his bland, full face curious. "Where did you get this?"

"A couple of section managers spotted a shoplifter down in the Taylor-Hyden store a couple of days ago. She was helping herself to kitchen hardware and was stuffing anything and everything into the pocketbook. They nabbed her, but when they tried to get the hardware back out of the pocketbook they couldn't find any. One of them lost a wrist watch groping around in it."

"Yes, but how did *you* wind up with the purse?"

Evanson shrugged. "Ever since the end of the war in '71, when they

organized Psych, they've turned shoplifters over to them. This woman was taken to Psych, but when they jarred her into remembering who she was, she couldn't recall having the purse. After Psych had looked at the pocketbook, they naturally sent it over to us. Here, I'll show you why."

Evanson picked up a meter stick and began to push it into the pocketbook. It went in about ten centimeters, to the bottom of the purse—

And kept on going.

It didn't poke out the bottom. It didn't even bulge the purse.

Collins goggled at it. "Holy smoke, how'd you do that?"

"Maybe it's going somewhere else. Fourth dimension. I don't know."

"Nuts!"

"Where else, then?" Evanson laid the meter stick down. "Another thing about that pocketbook," he added. "No matter what you do, you *can't* turn it inside out."

Collins looked at the dark inside of the pocketbook. Gingerly he stuck his finger in, rubbed the metallic ring, scratched it with his nail. A shiny line appeared. "That's aluminum in there," he said. "An aluminum circle."

Evanson took it and looked. "All the stuff she was stealing was aluminum," he said. "That's one reason we called you. You know your mechanics and you know your metals. We've been trying for three days to figure out what happens here. We can't. Maybe you can."

"What have you been doing?"

"Pushing stuff in. Checking it with all the instruments, X-ray, everything. Didn't tell us a thing. We'd like to know where that stuff goes that we push in."

Collins dropped an aluminum button into the purse. It went through the aluminum circle and vanished. "Say," he asked suddenly, scowling, "what do you mean, you can't turn this thing inside out?"

"It's a second-order geometric form." Evanson lit a cigarette carefully. "You can turn a first-order form, like a sphere or rubber ball, inside out through a small hole in the surface. But you *can't* turn an inner tube inside out, no matter what you do."

"Why not?"

"Because it's got a hole in it. And you can't pull a hole through a hole. Not even an infinitesimal hole."

"Well?" said Collins, frowning.

"It's the same thing with that purse. We think it's wrapped around a

chunk of another universe. A four-dimensional universe. And you can't pull a chunk of another universe through this one without causing a lot of trouble."

"But you *can* turn an inner tube inside out," Collins protested. "It may not look like an inner tube any more, but it will all come through the hole."

Evanson eyed the pocketbook on the table. "Maybe so. A second-order geometric under condition of stress. But there's one hitch to that. *It won't be an inner tube any more.*"

Evanson pushed the fourth item made of aluminum into the purse. He shook his head tiredly. "I don't know. *Something* is taking that aluminum—" He pushed in a wooden ruler; it popped right out again. "And it wants *only* aluminum. Nothing else. That detective had an aluminum military watch, which disappeared from his wrist, but he had two gold rings on that hand, and neither one was touched."

"Let's play some thinking games," Collins said.

Evanson looked up sharply. "What do you mean?"

Collins grinned. "*Whatever* is on the other side of that pocketbook seems to want aluminum. Why? There's an aluminum ring around the mouth of the purse—all around it. Like a portal. But it isn't very big, and it doesn't use much aluminum. They seem to want lots more."

"They?"

"Whatever takes the metal but pushes back the wood."

"Why?"

"We could venture a guess. Maybe they're building *another* opening. A large one."

Evanson stared at him. "Don't be silly," he said. "Why—"

"I was just thinking out loud," said Collins mildly. He picked up a steel meter stick. Taking a firm grip on one end, he pushed the other end into the purse.

Evanson watched, puzzled. "They don't want it. They're trying to push it back."

Collins continued to insert the stick, with pressure, and suddenly the end appeared, curving back out. Like a flash Collins grabbed it and began tugging both ends at once.

"Watch it, watch it!" Evanson snapped. "You're making their universe conform to our geometry!" The purse seemed to sag inward.

One end of the rod suddenly slipped out of Collins's hand. He fell back, grasping the stick. It was straight.

"Evanson!" he snapped excitedly. "Can you get a winch up here?"

Evanson blinked dully, and nodded.

"Good," said Collins. "I think I know how we can hook onto their universe."

The big three-inch steel bar rolled easily into the lab on a dolly. The end of the bar, for six inches, was covered with shiny aluminum tubing and bent into a sharp hook.

"Is the winch ready?" Collins asked excitedly.

Evanson told him it was.

"Then slide the purse onto the end of the bar."

The end of the bar disappeared into the pocketbook.

"What are you trying to do?" Evanson asked uneasily.

"They seem to want aluminum, so we're going to give them some. If they're building another opening through with it, I want to hook onto the opening and pull it out into this lab. They'll be putting the aluminum on this bar with the rest. If we can hook onto that aluminum, they'll either have to cut it free and let us retrieve it, or open it into this lab."

Evanson scowled. "But what if they don't do either?"

"They *have* to. If we pull a non-free section of their universe through the purse, it will put a terrific strain on their whole geometric pattern. Their whole universe will be twisted. Just like an inner tube."

The winch squeaked as Collins worked the bar to and fro inside the purse.

"Up a little," he said to the operator.

Evanson shook his head sourly. "I don't see—" he began. The bar twanged under sudden pressure.

"Hold it! You've got it hooked!" Collins shouted.

The winch squealed noisily, the motor whining under the strain. The steel bar slid slowly out of the purse, millimeter by millimeter, pulled as taut as a piano wire. Every ten minutes one of the technicians made a chalk mark on the bar by the mouth of the purse.

Frank Collins filled a pipe and puffed nervously. "The way I see it," he said, "these beings pried a small fourth-dimension hole into our universe, and somehow got that woman under a suggestive trance. They made her collect aluminum so they could build a bigger opening."

"But why?" Evanson poured coffee out of a thermos. It was late, and

the whole building was silent and deserted except for this one lab section. The only noise in the room was the whine of the winch, straining at the other universe.

"Who knows? To get more and more aluminum? Whatever the reason, they want to get through to our universe. Maybe theirs is in some danger or other. Hell, the reason may be so alien that we couldn't possibly understand it."

"But what's the idea of hooking onto them?" Evanson's eyes were worried.

"Control. We pull a non-free chunk of their universe into ours, and they can't use the opening. It'll be plugged up. The more we pull through, the more strain on the structure of their universe. They'll have to listen to *our* terms then. They'll have to give us their information so that we can build openings and examine them properly. If they don't, we'll wreck their universe."

"But you don't even know what they're *doing* in there!"

Collins shrugged, made another chalk mark on the bar. The bar was humming.

"I don't think we should take the risk," Evanson complained. "I didn't have permission to try this. I just let you go ahead on my own authority, on data—" he shuddered suddenly—"that's so damned vague, it makes no sense at all."

Collins knocked out his pipe sharply. "It's all the data we have."

"I say it's wrong. I think we should release the bar right now, and wait till Chalmers gets here in the morning."

Collins eyed the winch with growing uneasiness, lighting his pipe with a match held in unsteady fingers. "We *can't* release the bar now. The tapered sheaves are under too much tension. We couldn't even burn through that rod with an oxy torch in less than twenty minutes —and it would jolt the whole building apart when it broke."

"But the danger—" Evanson stood up, his forehead beaded with perspiration. He nodded toward the creaking winch. "You might be gambling our whole universe."

"Oh, calm down!" Collins said angrily. "We don't have any choice now, or even time to talk it over. We're *doing* it, and that's all there is to it. When you grab a tiger by the tail, you've got to hang on."

Evanson crossed the room excitedly. "It seems to me," he said tensely, "that the tiger might have the advantage. If it went the wrong way, think what *they* could do to *our* universe!"

Collins blew smoke from the corner of his mouth. "At any rate, I'm glad we thought of it first—" He trailed off, his face slowly turning white.

Evanson followed his stare, and his breath came in a sharp gasp. The thermos clattered noisily to the floor. He pointed at the second chalk mark, sliding *into* the pocketbook.

"You mean you hope we did," he said.

William F. Temple

WAY OF ESCAPE

The parallel world pictured in this very human story by an outstanding British science-fiction author describes a society that is a little like a child's idea of a mechanized earthly paradise. Everything is wonderful, everything is just about the way you would like the world to be if you had your choice.

The only trouble is that such a world also has the faults of its perfections. For how, if everything *is wonderful, can there be standards of comparison? What is bad, or poor, or ugly, if everything is thought to be good, and rich, and beautiful? One man found the lack of such standards unbearable. . . .*

THE young man leaned upon the black-gray parapet gazing upriver toward the Gothic spikes of the House of Parliament in silhouette against a yellow and red autumn sunset. Something in his attitude caused Dr. Stafford to pause.

This young man was in a state of extreme tension. He was screwing himself up to go through with something unpleasant. As Stafford watched, the young man, with deliberation, set his right foot upon the ledge of the wall's skirting and placed his hands firmly upon the slightly convex top of the parapet.

At which moment Stafford tapped him on the shoulder and said, "You'll find the water very cold and your struggle in it more protracted and painful than you anticipate."

The young man started, then relaxed and turned. He was not quite so young as Stafford had imagined. He was nearing the middle thirties, there were streaks of gray at his temples, and his eyes had a hunted and hopeless look. Nevertheless, he retained something of the self-control of the educated man.

With a certain dignity he answered, "Possibly. But what alternative is there?"

"I can give you an alternative," said Stafford, leaning against the parapet in a conversational attitude.

"I don't think so."

Stafford gave him his card.

"Dr. S. E. Stafford?" said the other man. "Well, my name's Raines. So you're a doctor, eh? Perhaps you *can* give me an alternative. Say an overdose of morphine or Veronal."

"I'm a doctor of physics," pointed out Stafford.

"Oh—you physicists have something to answer for, with your atomic bombs and rockets." This with some bitterness.

"I did some work on atomic energy," said Stafford reflectively. "My purpose was partly the curiosity which leads research workers on, partly a desire to release atomic energy to replace man's dwindling resources of coal and gasoline. I had no interest in making big bangs. Only the monkey men among us seem to want to do that."

"Then you should keep such discoveries out of their hands."

"My dear fellow, if an inventor designed such an innocuous thing as a pair of nutcrackers to save these monkeys breaking their jaws, the first thing the monkeys would do would be to find a way of using them to break everyone else's heads. Their reasoning is, you see, that if they didn't, then everyone else would steal their nuts."

"There's plenty of nuts for everyone in the world."

"True. You see that, and I see that. But can anyone persuade them to see that? No, they're motivated wholly by greed and suspicion, which in short means fear—fear of loss. You can't persuade people by reason who think on a plane of emotion. You can't get on common ground with them. By the way, you sound much too reasonable a person to be attempting suicide."

"It's because I'm reasonable that I'm committing suicide," said Raines gloomily. "In a fit of temporary sanity. You see, I can't be happy and I can't work—I'm an artist—unless I have peace of mind.

"This world has become fear-obsessed. You can't escape the atmosphere. Everyone about you is nursing some fear or collection of fears. Fear of poverty, fear of loss of money or health or employment. Fear of criticism, fear of failure in the success race to accumulate money, power, prestige."

"Think you're exaggerating," said Stafford.

The other ignored him and continued, "Overriding everything, the fear of yet another world war. I can't feel that my life or my work mean anything at all with the threat of an atomic rocket dropping on it at any moment. And that's what your unteachable monkeys are going to do, you know. Their nature is unalterable. I'm sick—*sick!*" he repeated savagely, "of living under the sword of Damocles."

"Most of your generation must be, with two world wars within only half a lifetime and another already threatening. So you are seeking peace of mind in death? Don't you think there are any other ways of escape?"

"No," said Raines. "No good dodging off to remote Pacific islands in the next war. It wasn't much good in the last. There'll be no safe place in the world next time. There'll even be air battles over the North Pole. It'll be touch and go whether some fools don't manage to blow the whole planet apart."

"Quite," said Stafford. "You've hit upon my own fear obsession there. I feel much as you do. I want some place to continue my research work in peace and with some assurance of time to get results. And I don't want it monkeyed with any more. I think I may have found such a place. If you would accompany me home, I'll explain."

Raines hesitated.

"You've nothing to lose, and that water's still cold," said Stafford.

"All right, then," said Raines slowly.

Stafford's home was an ugly but roomy house in one of the squares south of Euston Road. Most of the basement had been knocked into a private workshop. The rest of the house above it was one great mass of books, in which small areas had been cleared to fit in a few chairs, a table, and a couple of beds. Stafford shared the house with a friend, a philosopher named Cornman, and the pair of them lived like mice gnawing out their own living space.

Cornman had a low forehead, heavy, prominent brows, brown eyes deep set, and huge bowed shoulders. At first glance he might well have been one of those classed by Stafford as "monkeys." In actual fact, he was the antithesis. Moreover, he had a sense of humor—indeed, it was the thing he prized above all his considerable intellectual gifts.

When he heard Stafford's introduction and explanation of Raines he laughed deeply, like an operatic Mephistopheles.

"My friend," he addressed Raines, "you take life too seriously. Everybody does. It's all very funny if you stand back far enough to get a view of things whole. The world's a circus. And man is a mixture of trained seal, trapeze artist, wild animal, and clown. Mostly clown. The spectacle of him getting up to the most elaborate and ingenious dodges with an air of immense seriousness, dignity, and self-righteousness, to avoid looking any facts in the face, is an inexhaustible amusement."

"Perhaps it was once," said Raines. "Nowadays he doesn't throw custard pies but atomic and bacteriological bombs, and the audience gets the benefit of them, too."

"All the more fun," said Cornman with a deep chuckle.

"We don't happen to be philosophers, Corny," said Stafford. "We want to go somewhere and work quietly. Otherwise our lives don't mean a thing. Raines, here, doesn't think there's anywhere to go. As you know, I think there is."

"If you're thinking of rocketing to another planet in the solar system," said Raines, "you might as well forget it. It won't be long before our monkeys come rocketing after you, bringing their circus."

"My idea," said Stafford, seating himself on a pile of volumes of a technical dictionary, "is that of an escape through time."

"Past or future?" queried Raines, and added, "Not that it matters. I'm convinced that time travel is paradoxical and quite impossible in a physical sense. And I can't paint pictures in my astral body, you know."

"I believe time to be intermittent," said Stafford. "Its smooth continuity is only an illusion through the manner of presentation, like the separate pictures on a movie film. I believe we exist in a series of spasms.

"One minute the world and all its beings is there. Then it's plunged into complete nonexistence for a spell. Then abruptly it exists again. And so on. Naturally, we are only cognizant of the spells during which we exist. Thus our existence seems continuous to us."

"Quite an interesting little theory, but I can't see that you can get any facts to substantiate it," commented Raines.

"Are you a mathematician?" asked Stafford, and Raines shook his head.

"Pity," said Stafford. "I've worked out a beautiful thesis to prove that the nature of time, like light and gravitation, is electromagnetic. A wave motion, as it were, and we exist on the crests of the waves but not in the troughs."

Cornman laughed abruptly at some fancy, and sang in a rumbling bass, "My bonny lies over the ocean. . . ."

"Assuming it to be true, then what about it?" asked Raines a little impatiently. "I still don't see—"

Cornman broke off his song to interrupt, "Can't you perceive, my dear young man, that Moses here believes that the Promised Land lies

in the interstices of the time we know? A sort of jigsaw-puzzle world fitted into the gaps of ours."

Raines looked questioningly at Stafford. The latter smiled rather deprecatingly.

"In general, that's the idea," he said. "We exist for a space, then don't for a space. Immediately we cease to exist, another world flashes into existence. Then it in its turn ceases to exist, while we flash back for our period again, and so on alternately. Both worlds imagine their own time is continuous and unbroken."

"H'm," said Raines thoughtfully. "An ingenious extension of your theory, but still—no facts."

"And that's where you're wrong," said Stafford, rising. "Come and see my machine."

He led Raines along a passage to a room on the ground floor. Cornman followed them leisurely, lighting a big black cigar.

The room contained nothing but an ebonite control panel on a makeshift table—a circular black pedestal in the center of the floor, a few inches high and a couple of feet in diameter, surrounded by a ring of bright copper—and a twin to this pedestal, but inverted, fixed to the ceiling directly above it. A delta of cables from the panel were gathered into a bunch and thrust through a hole in the bare plank flooring.

Pointing the latter out, Stafford said, "They go to my power units in the basement. That's where the bulk of the machine is, really. But this converter here is the important part. It has to be on ground level, for it seems that ground level is the same in the other world as here. If I had put this downstairs with the rest, then passengers converted to the other time would also be converted into corpses interred in the ground."

"Without even a burial service," put in Cornman complacently.

"I'm not going into details about this, for it would take a layman a month of Sundays to get even a glimmering of what happens," said Stafford. "Briefly, any person placed on that black disk can be subjected to a barrage of electromagnetic waves of exactly opposite pitch, though of similar intensity, to those which at present determine his existence.

"As is well known in physics, two opposing wave systems will cancel out into a uniform line. That is, nonexistence. Nonexistence is the

frontier between our world and this other. When that is attained, it only needs a slight push or boost of power for the subject to be edged over the border and be caught up by the other time system."

"That'll do," said Raines. "Technicalities bore me. I take it you want to use me as a guinea pig?"

"Oh, the thing works, all right," said Stafford rather quickly. "Only—"

"Only Stafford is a scientist," said Cornman dryly. "He doesn't approve of blind risks. He likes to make doubly sure that he is standing on firm ground before he takes the next step. The scientific method, they call it."

"It's merely that I don't want to step out of the frying pan into the fire," said Stafford. "I'm the only person who knows this machine well enough to operate it. It needs hair-trigger adjustment and lightning handling. If I send anyone through it, I can bring them back. But if I got anyone to send me through it, it would be most unlikely that he could bring me back.

"Once anyone has crossed the border, so to speak, it's the deuce to get him back on our wave crests. He will stay there for the rest of his life if the operation is not performed faultlessly. When I make the trip I shall be committed."

"You intend to go, then?" asked Raines.

"It depends. I want to take all my manuscripts with me and settle down in this other world to continue my research. But first I want to make certain it will be possible to settle down there. I want to know what sort of people they are."

"I don't think there's enough meat on you to tempt a cannibal," said Cornman humorously.

"What makes you think there are people there?" asked Raines. "Come to that, you haven't even convinced me that there is another world."

Stafford rummaged in a drawer in the table supporting the control panel. He found a thin wad of photographs and passed them to Raines. As the latter looked through them, Stafford explained.

"I have sent various objects into that world and brought them back. First a chronometer, to determine the wave pitch, as it were—that is, the duration of the intervals of our alternating existences. It turned out to be surprisingly long.

"You'll be interested to learn that every twenty-two days, four hours, eleven minutes, forty-three seconds, this world of ours ceases to exist for just that same length of time. Only, as we cease to exist too, we don't notice it. Next, I sent a camera through several times, with a delayed action shutter set for a different delay each time. You'll notice that some of those photos are taken in daylight and others at night."

Raines studied them. The site of the camera was obviously always the same, but not the direction it was facing. This site seemed to be somewhere on a rolling grassy plain set with rare trees. About two miles distant was a city walled on the scale of ancient Babylon. But the towers showing above the mighty walls were certainly not Babylonian. They were of bright metal and many-windowed.

The night views showed these windows lighted, and a little thrill went through Raines when he realized that this probably meant the city was inhabited. Who were the inhabitants? What kind of life were they? A sense of wonder grew and possessed him.

He became a child again, with an imaginative inward eye, gazing upon the strange and glittering worlds evoked by Wells. It made it the more exciting to realize that this was no tale of fantasy. These photographs he held in his hands were actual views of another world, hitherto unseen and unsuspected by man.

Some of the views showed a white, wide road curving across the plain toward the city. On one of them the camera had caught a small open car of some sort on the road. There were two small black dots showing above the top of the car. The heads of the occupants? It looked remarkably like it.

Raines had come out of his weary indifference. He was really interested now.

"This is worth investigating," he said. "I wonder if the atmosphere there is breathable for us?"

"It is," said Stafford. "I sent three rabbits across. I got two of them back in the best of health. They had fed well on the grass. The third was dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes. It had obviously wandered onto the road and been run over by some vehicle. The mark of the wheel was plain upon it." He picked up a glass flask with a clockwork mechanism bound to it.

"I've been sending through gadgets like these to get samples of the air," he continued. "First creating a vacuum in the flask, of course.

The clockwork is a time mechanism which unstops the flask, then stops it up again.

"I've got a gauge fixed to one of them. It shows the atmospheric pressure to be the same as ours—fourteen and a half pounds per square inch. And the composition is much the same. It's rather purer, in fact."

"Could you demonstrate sending and getting back one of those things?" asked Raines.

"There are only set times for such demonstrations as that," said Stafford. "They occur every twenty-two days, four hours, eleven minutes, forty-three seconds. That is, at the very end of our period of existence and the beginning of the next world's turn. At this moment I could only send the flask into nonexistence, for just now the other world is nonexistent. The next switch moment actually occurs tomorrow morning at ten-four. I was hoping—"

"You were hoping to send me, and not just a flask," said Raines. "Otherwise you'll have to wait another twenty-two days to send me. It's all right. I don't really need any demonstrations. If the machine finishes me it will save the Thames the job."

"That's what Stafford thought," said Cornman with a sort of benign bluntness.

At three minutes past ten the next morning, Raines, carrying satchels of concentrated food sufficient for three weeks, a slung water bottle, toilet articles, and a sketch book (he had refused to take weapons), mounted the black pedestal.

"Let me get this clear before I go," he said. "You are sending me for just one interval, that is, for the pitch of one wave—twenty-two days. And it doesn't matter where I wander in the other world, this thing will snatch me back to this spot."

"If I can manipulate the controls correctly," said Stafford, his gaze fastened upon a chronometer, his hands poised. "I haven't failed yet. Seven seconds to go."

"Right. Shoot," said Raines.

"Our roving reporter—" began Cornman, and was interrupted by the deafening whipping and cracking of blue-white electric flashes darting up and down twisted paths through the air between the copper ring on the floor and its opposite number on the ceiling.

Cornman turned his eyes from the brilliance and glimpsed Stafford,

his face tense with concentration, running his fingers like a high-speed typist over sliding resistances, buttons, switches, and the milled knobs of dials. Just for a second or so—then Stafford froze, the cracking ceased with a snap that banished the leaping shadows.

And Cornman became aware that his ears were ringing and that there was a smell of ozone. Because of this temporary deafness, Raines's voice sounded faint to him. He didn't get the import of it. It sounded like "Idlmstfgtnidtcmbk."

He swung round and blinked to behold Raines standing on the little pedestal in a long robe of a yellow so vivid it almost stabbed the eye. Raines had grown a little pointed beard, he was smiling, his eyes were full of a serene amusement. He stepped down and gripped Stafford's hand.

"It's great!" he said enthusiastically. "You'll have to come over there. I never dreamed before that such bliss was possible."

Stafford's tired eyes lighted up.

"Nothing to worry about?" he asked.

"Worry!" said Raines with a snort. "Nobody there knows the meaning of the word. Hello, Cornman, heard any good jokes lately?"

"Hello," responded Cornman. "What was that word you used the moment you arrived? Something in your blissful friends' language?"

"Their language is English," smiled Raines. "Only through usage it has developed into a kind of verbal shorthand. The vowels have mostly been dropped, and more degrees of expression put into the consonants. Civilization speeds up thought processes.

"People here are already thinking faster than they can speak. It's logical to expect speech to take short cuts. What I said was 'I had almost forgotten I had to come back.' Believe it or not, I've got so in the way of speaking like that these last few weeks that I feel I am speaking painfully slowly and deliberately now."

"Let's go and sit down in the other room and let you tell us the story," said Stafford. "I take it this other world is higher up the scale of civilization than ours?" he flung over his shoulder as he led the way.

"Way up," said Raines.

"Things swam about me for a moment," said Raines, beginning his narrative. "I seemed to drop a few inches—the height of the pedestal, I expect—and then I found myself standing on that grassy plain shown in your photo, in bright sunlight. And there was the walled city, a couple of miles away.

"The road was but a hundred yards off. I gained it and started walking toward the city. Apart from the unusual design of the city, there was no sense of being on another planet. The gravitation, air, and natural scenery were the same as here in England. I judged that the planet which kept changing places with the earth was in general identical to it. It remained to be seen how the inhabitants compared.

"It didn't remain long. I had barely covered a quarter of a mile before I saw a little car—like that in the photo—speeding toward me from the city. I stopped and waited for it.

"It overshot me by twenty yards. I glimpsed a couple of men in it arrayed in scarlet robes, like cardinals. It stopped. The men in it did something that caused their seats to swivel around, and this obviated the necessity of turning the car, for it came slowly back to me, and what had been its rear was now its front."

He paused, then resumed his story.

"The men were just like any other men, except that they looked much better humored. None of the tense frowning you see all the time in the streets of our cities. The only lines on their faces were the lines of laughter.

"One of them leaned out and addressed me with a smile. 'Hooru.'

"It sounded vaguely like, 'Who are you?', so I answered, 'My name is Raines. I have come from another world. What do you call this place?'

"Obviously they didn't comprehend a word of it. They smiled at one another and motioned me to a sort of high dicky seat which had sprung up at the back of the car. Then we set off at a swift pace for the city.

"The city gate was just like a great roller blind. It rolled up at our approach, and we shot underneath it and through the fairly populous streets without slackening speed. The buildings reared above us like skyscrapers. There were no sidewalks. People, all in differently colored but always vivid robes, seemed to be walking just where they pleased, paying no heed to the traffic, of which there was little enough.

"We were spinning round corners so fast that several times I nearly shot off my seat. I was scared, and yelled to the driver to slow down. Both men merely looked at me in puzzlement. One pedestrian, a tall chap in a yellow robe like mine, walked slap in front of our car. He saw us. He could have avoided us. I believe we could have avoided him. There was a slight jar, a bump, and looking back I saw him lying in the road. Only his robe was yellow and crimson.

"And the two men in my car were grinning at each other! I felt sick. What mad and murderous people were these, I wondered.

"We stopped at a tall white building. In a few minutes I was shown into a room somewhere near the top of it, with a view over the city and the surrounding plain. The two men retired, leaving me alone. Presently the door opened, and in came a portly gray-haired fellow in a robe of startling orange. He sat himself comfortably opposite me, and began what I presumed to be an interrogation.

"I said, 'I'm sorry, but I don't understand your language. You don't, by any chance, happen to have heard of English?'

" 'English?' he echoed, and rattled off again. He stopped when he saw that I wasn't getting any of it. 'Why do you speak archaic English?' he asked, suddenly and surprisingly.

" 'This is the only English I know,' I said.

"He smiled. 'Then it's lucky I have made it my hobby. I was asking who you were and where you came from.'

" 'It's a story you'll hardly credit,' I said, and told him how and why I was visiting his world. I was amazed that he accepted it all without expressing any doubt. He asked more about earth, its inhabitants and their behavior. Then he settled himself to give me a long account of his world.

"In brief, it amounted to this—their world is nearly a twin of our own. Although the two worlds had developed side by side in time, as it were, theirs had gained about a thousand years on us. There must be some small difference in the intervals for some reason or other, possibly only a single second. But the aggregate over thousands of millions of years amounted to a thousand years.

"In effect, their world is what this one will be in a thousand years' time if it continues to follow a parallel course—which, mark you, it has done so far undeviatingly.

"I was in a town called London—or 'Lndn' in their speedier English—round about 2947 A.D. There had been a Third World War—quite as nice a mess as we visualized, except that the planet managed to remain in one piece. But no nation did.

"All that was left afterwards were a few globally scattered strong points—vast, thick-walled fortresses, having no contact with one another, and harboring displaced persons thrown together by chance in the total world upheaval.

"From these grew up a system of walled cities, widely separated,

each sufficient unto itself, each in deadly fear of attack from other cities and in a perpetual state of alert defense. Most cities had a radar system that detected the presence of any unknown persons or objects approaching the city by any means. I myself had been detected at once on the radar screens, surveyed through telescopes, and a car dispatched to bring me in for interrogation.

" 'Though that was merely through force of habit and curiosity,' said the man in the orange robe—his name was Tmsn. 'We did not fear you. We don't fear anybody or anything any longer. Fear has been abolished and war has gone with it.' "

Raines paused again, briefly.

"Tmsn elucidated this statement. In the walled, fear-haunted city of Lndn after the Third World War a body of wise men set themselves to answer the question: 'Why, if all men hate war and only wish to work and pursue happiness in peace, do they keep starting wars?'

"The answer, they decided, was because man was still saddled with the brain of an animal, a beast of prey, with the impulse to turn and rend everything that threatened it. While man was still a beast, that blind sense of self-preserving was natural and fitting. But man had one fundamental and growing difference from the beasts—an imagination.

"Unfortunately this imagination was tethered to his impulse to attack threatening things. He began to see threats that weren't there at all—they were only in his leaping, anticipating imagination. He began to fear the attack phantasms in his own mind, and gave them the flesh of other people, other tribes, other nations.

"The wise men decided that this unholy union of fear and imagination had to be broken. One or the other had to be cut out if man was to have any future at all. To cut out imagination meant to return to the beast. They decided to cut out fear.

"Upon analysis, they found fear, worry, hatred, and rage were all disguises of just one thing—doubt. Doubt of one's own ability to be equal to any threatening thing brought a surge of adrenalin from the glands into the blood stream to supply fighting energy to tackle the threat, imagined or otherwise. And when men were charged with this fighting energy, wars began of themselves.

"This doubt center of the mind, they found, was located in the frontal lobes of the brain. Hunting in the records, they found reports of a brain operation current in war neurosis cases during and after the

Second World War. It consisted merely of severing the white nerves joining the frontal lobes to the rest of the brain.

"There was a Scottish surgeon who had specialized in the operation —the newspapers and journals of the end of the war period gave much space to it. The shell-shocked people, the war neurosis cases, were simply men distracted by doubt. Most of these people worried themselves ill fighting the enemies of their own imagination. A threat is just as real as you imagine it to be.

"The operation cut out that doubting. It brought unity, which meant peace of mind, to the patients. They became happy, good-humored, self-confident, unmalicious people. Some of them had their speech and hearing centers slightly affected. That was because of the clumsy surgical tools employed—a gimlet and a knife.

" 'Nowadays,' said Tmsn, 'we use heat and burn away the nerves painlessly, with no boring or cutting. We don't even break the skin. It's merely a matter of getting a fix on the part to be removed, by crossing two narrow electronic beams there. Also, the early, crude operations often brought on symptoms of fatness and lethargy. Obviously because fear no longer stimulated the glands to function. So now we make a little adjustment to the thyroid gland.'

"He went on, 'The practice of this operation spread and has now become compulsory all over the world. We are a happy, confident people. We know war is finished now. As for the ordinary bothers of life as your people live it, we care no more than the lilies of the field.

" 'You will not find here people worrying because they've got to get to a certain place by a certain time or do anything by a certain time. No one worries about time in the least. Nobody worries about his health, so everyone is healthy. Most illnesses are products of worry.

" 'Nobody worries if there isn't enough food—they just help themselves to other people's. The other people don't care. If they starve they don't care—you only die once.

" 'You won't find people caring what others think of them or their work. There is no fear of criticism. In your world most people love bright colors but they're afraid to wear them. As you may have noticed, we are not afraid. We are free people.'

"I asked him the meaning of the incident of our car callously running down a harmless pedestrian. He laughed.

" 'Such things are fairly common,' he said. 'Only somebody from

your sick world would think comment necessary. The fellow didn't doubt that he could get across the road before the car got to him. The fact that he didn't doesn't mean a thing. He just didn't, that's all. I'm certain it didn't worry him in the least. No more than it would have worried me. Or you, after we have cured you.'

" 'What!' I exclaimed.

" 'As I've said, this lobular operation is compulsory for all in this world. You're in it now. *Ergo*—'

" 'But I don't want to be operated on.'

" 'Of course not. You fear it. That's a symptom of your illness. After the operation you'll wonder how you could have objected.'

" 'How dare you presume to operate on me against my will! This is dictatorship. I won't have it,' I cried.

" 'In your world,' said Tmsn, 'school doctors remove septic tonsils against the children's wishes. They realize they are doing it for the children's own good, and the children's objections literally are—childish.'

" 'I'm not childish.'

" 'You are. Your whole world is. That's what's wrong with it. For your own good, we are going to give you treatment.'

"Well, they operated. And then I saw what a fool I had been to fear it. There was nothing to fear any more. What a great part of my life had been wasted in futile worrying! Everything became easy to me now that there was no crippling doubt. Here, look at my sketch book."

He dragged it out of a capacious inner pocket and tossed it to Stafford, who glanced through it with a deepening frown.

"I filled that in a day," said Raines. "I drew with swift, confident lines. Before, I used to think genius meant taking infinite pains. I spent half of my time erasing. I never had to erase a line of that. I was sure and unerring in every stroke.

"I studied the abbreviated English, too, and mastered it in a few days. Study is easy if the mind is cleared of doubt. The memory is infallible. You only forget if you fear you will forget."

"And what do you propose doing now?" asked Cornman.

Raines stood up. "I'm going to see all the influential people here I can. Newspaper editors and proprietors, politicians, doctors, surgeons. I'll soon persuade them that everyone should have this brain operation.

It'll end war for good and all and bring man perfect peace at last. Here begins the millennium!"

He marched toward the door and paused to call to Stafford, who was now staring gloomily out of the window, "I'll be back in three weeks. Have no doubt of it. We'll take the next trip together."

He was gone.

Stafford had a pantomimic glimpse of him striding down the road in his flying yellow robe, singing joyously.

"H'm," grunted Cornman, turning the leaves of the sketch book. "I don't think our friend has much future as an artist. This stuff looks like the work of a five-year-old. In fact, I take a poor view of his future altogether in this world. He won't last long if he continues to have no doubt that he has the right of way over six-wheeler buses."

He gave a laugh that seemed to come from his chest.

"Well, there you are, Stafford," he rumbled on. "The choice is between living in a fool's paradise or a sane man's hell."

Stafford started to say something, stifled it, then turned on his heel and walked out.

It was early evening, and still Stafford had not returned.

Cornman went alone to a café to have the meal he usually shared with Stafford. As he sat at the table smoking his after-dinner cigar and reading the evening paper, his eyes lighted upon a paragraph.

MAN DROWNS IN RESCUE ATTEMPT

Shortly after noon today an unknown man, aged about 35, was drowned in a spectacular attempt to rescue Mr. R. H. Strongarm, well-known director of United Armaments, Ltd., who had accidentally fallen from his motor launch as it passed under Waterloo Bridge.

According to witnesses, the unknown man, who wore a full-length robe of bright yellow and who is suspected of having been a member of some strange religious sect, without a moment's hesitation dived headlong from the bridge in an attempt to rescue Mr. Strongarm. After a few moments it became obvious that the would-be rescuer had no idea how to swim, and soon sank and was not seen again.

Mr. Strongarm, who was rescued by a patrol boat of the River Police, said, "I have never seen such courage. It is a great pity the man did not live to realize that he had attempted

to save a life—I say this with all modesty—of such importance to our national security."

Cornman's guffaw made other diners turn to stare at him. He got up and left, hoping to find Stafford at home so that he could amuse him with this delicious piece of irony.

The man waiting at home for him was not Stafford but a police sergeant. The sergeant asked him when he had last seen Stafford, made other pertinent inquiries, and finally revealed that Stafford had been fished out of the Thames, dead.

"He jumped from the Embankment," said the sergeant. "People saw him from a distance but couldn't get there in time to save him. He left this note for you, Mr. Cornman, on the parapet."

He handed Cornman a folded piece of paper. Cornman read the pencilled scrawl on it.

Dear Old Corny,

I've walked the streets for hours but I can see no way out except this one. That other world is worse than useless to me. How can I conduct my research if my critical faculty is to be destroyed?

That was how Raines was destroyed as an artist.

My work means everything to me. But it is impossible to adhere to the scientific method without the element of doubt. All science has been built up laboriously on a system of doubting, doubting, doubting, until a theory has been accepted as almost beyond doubt. But never wholly beyond doubt, for that is against the spirit of science.

Science must forever doubt that it has final knowledge.

But the system of trial and error falls to pieces if you will admit to no error. Progress, except for absolute flukes, is impossible. And progress in this present world of ours, it seems, is impossible, too.

I'm getting out.

It will, I'm sure, amuse you to learn that I'm jumping into the Thames from that very spot where only yesterday I restrained Raines from performing this act of sanity. I can almost hear you laughing.

Your old friend,
Stafford

But Cornman found it difficult to laugh that night alone amid the labyrinth of books. He missed Stafford's company. He felt lonely and unhappy—and insecure.

Roger Flint Young

SUBURBAN FRONTIERS

Here is a tale of the development of means of intercommunication between our world and a parallel world that is interconnected with ours at all points. The other world has a time rate so much faster than ours that we seem to be standing still in our tracks, from their point of view, even when we are traveling as fast as we can. Now, suppose that a couple of shrewd young businessmen-engineers think up a method of capitalizing on this time difference and establishing profitable trade between the two worlds. There might be some uncanny side effects. . . .

GEORGE LINDEN stopped at the threshold of the office and looked across to the window where Badick was sitting. Badick looked up from the papers in his hand and started to smile. He saw Linden's face then, and the smile never quite hit his lips.

The two men looked at each other gravely, while Linden closed the door behind him, then went to his own desk in the corner. It was Badick who looked away finally, his eyes drifting toward the window, then, remembering, back to the papers in his hand.

There was something very close to hatred in Linden's young, almost handsome face. The little wrinkles at the corners of his mouth made his blue eyes look bitter and tired. He still watched Badick, waiting, wanting the older man to speak first. Badick still stared at the papers in his hands, not looking up, swallowing continually, his large Adam's apple running up and down his throat.

Linden sighed finally, put his feet up on the desk, and let his body relax. He looked away from Badick; his eyes sought a spot on the ceiling, failed to find one, and concentrated on nothing at all.

"You should have gone," he said. "You should have had to take it. It should have been your job."

Badick cleared his throat before answering. "I know it, George. Was it—bad?"

"Bad? *Bad?*" Linden laughed shortly. "He blistered me. He burned me. He turned me inside out and put hot coals between my skin and my bones. They're still there."

"George, I'm sorry. One of us had to go and say 'no' to him. You

could keep on saying it because you didn't have the authority to say anything else."

Linden ignored him. "And that was just the start. He'll crucify us, Will. Crucify us. You and me—I've wondered how that kind, gentle old statesman could survive among politicians. Now I know. He's got the personality of Medusa, the tongue of a hundred ports, and he'll have the vengeance of a jealous god."

Badick nodded. "I knew something of that, George. That's why you had to be the one to face him. You did say nothing doing?"

Linden grunted. "What choice did I have? The President of the United States turns on the heat, and I can't even give him an apology or a good reason. Just: 'No, Mr. President.' I won't go back, Will. You'll have to go next time."

Badick sighed and shrugged his resignation. "All right, George. We're unpatriotic, of course?"

"Naturally. Printably speaking, we are the very seeds of treason, the flowers that blossom in the hothouse of national disunity, and we are the core of defeat. And that's the least of our crimes. That we don't bow to President Martin S. Warner seems to be our major failing."

"I suppose so. Well, we've still got our business to run, George."

"For the moment, you mean. You don't think Basic Assurances is big enough to get away with this, Will. From what Warner said, we're already on the skids."

Badick met his eyes, now, and looked at him steadily. "How?"

"How? Lord, Will, they'll *fix* us. There's a dozen ways they can do it. From what Warner said, though, they'll know all our secrets, and the government will take care of things without troubling Basic Assurances at all."

"They could, of course." Badick stabbed at the intercom on his desk, waited until Miss Ayers answered. "Get Hammond in here." He looked at Linden again. "If they get the right men and follow us in theory, they could get there, all right."

Hammond came into the office, a small, balding young man, very self-reliant, very assured. He nodded slightly to the two men and took a chair without speaking.

"How are your rumors today, Hammond?"

Hammond shrugged slightly and kept the grin off his face. "The President had George for tea at the White House. It is said that the President found George quite indigestible."

Linden looked at Hammond then, and both men smiled slightly. "I'll bet," Linden suggested, "you could have told me that before it happened?"

"Almost," Hammond admitted.

Badick waved this aside. "We want to know if the government is making any effort to duplicate Basic Assurances' work."

Hammond seemed annoyed. "I send both of you reports every day. That's what you hire me for. Then you don't read what I send. If you'd—"

"All right, we don't read them all the time. How will it boil down?"

"Violently. Warner's been on your tail for about three months. They've backtracked both of you since your school days. They know every move you've made since then, every book you've read, every movie you've seen, every date you've had, and about every other thought that's been in your minds."

"All right. That doesn't help them."

"No? They know how your minds work and what's interested you through the years. They know what you wrote for college theses when you had your choice of material. They know where all your interests have been, and they have an idea of what they're after. They've checked every supply house and know every piece of equipment you've ever ordered. So they know what you used for materials and tools. They've got men who can put those things together."

"It still won't get them there."

"It started them well enough. All that, and ICM."

"They found that?"

"Sure, Will. They found that two months ago. ICM made a special calculating machine for you a few years ago. So they decided they needed one, too."

Linden looked a little pleased. "That's all right. Even with the special ICM machine it took us two years to get the answer. They can't put things through it any faster than we did."

Badick was frowning. "How many did they order?"

"Indefinite. They've already got delivery on a hundred and some of them. They're taking them as fast as ICM can get them off the line."

Linden looked at Hammond suspiciously. "It took ICM six months to make one for us."

"Sure. Then ICM thought the design over, decided it was good for general mathematical usage, and got it ready for mass production.

They were about to start their marketing campaign when government agents came along."

Linden swore softly. "How long, Will?"

Badick shrugged. "Depends on how well they know what they're doing. If they break the steps up properly between machines, they can get the answer in . . . if they're lucky, say—"

"They were lucky," Hammond broke in. He was very casual, as though it didn't matter, as though he didn't know it was a bombshell. "They got the answer three weeks ago. They built an experimental portal and tried it out yesterday."

There was silence for a few minutes. Linden and Badick waited for Hammond to speak. Hammond brought out a pair of nail clippers, worked on his nails, then trimmed the wick of his cigarette lighter.

"All right, what happened?"

Hammond smiled lightly, then. "I'm still waiting for the report."

Linden grunted. Hammond stood up. "I'll let you know as soon as I find out."

Both men nodded, but neither spoke. Hammond reached the door, then turned back.

"There's going to be a war." He wasn't looking at either of the other men.

"Yes," Badick said, admitting it. "Yes, there's going to be a war."

Hammond hesitated before going on, shifting uncomfortably. "There'll be some atomic bombing, naturally."

"Naturally." It was Badick again.

"Basic Assurances could get the ones that land in this country, and—Well, it'd save a lot of lives and property. It might be the balance in the war."

"Yes."

"Well—" Hammond looked at the two men, from one to the other, then down at the doorknob. "I guess it isn't my job to tell people things they already know."

"I guess not."

Hammond nodded. "That's the way I figure it. I'll let you know." He closed the door gently behind him.

"Well?"

Badick smiled. "I don't know anything to say."

"No. . . . I'm going to look around."

Badick didn't answer. Linden got up from his desk, then turned

back and shuffled through some papers, half wondering if there was anything that needed doing. He dropped them back to the desk and left the office.

Jane was in the outer office, talking to Miss Ayers. She didn't see him for the moment, and Linden stood still, watching her. As always, the first glance at her brought him the *feel* that was in the very sight of her: that intense look of the very goodness of life. Then, as always, the shocking drop inside him at the remembrance of her illness, already beginning to take the young life away from her.

Jane looked up, smiling, when she heard Linden, and went to him swiftly. She was still smiling when she kissed him, and her soft eyes looked over his shoulder into some far distance.

Linden held her away to get a good look at her. He dabbed at the corners of her eyes where the teardrops were.

"How is it, Jane?"

"Good, darling. Good."

"What do you mean?"

The smile was fixed on her face now, looking a bit strained. "No worse, George. Not that they can tell. So that means it's good."

Linden nodded and tried to smile. "All right, Jane. Let's sit down some place and talk."

"No. I'm always resting. I'd rather walk."

"I was just going downstairs to look things over. Want to come with me?"

"Yes." She took his arm, steered him away from the elevator toward the stairs. "I said walk."

The stairs brought them out on the first floor, behind the reception room. Linden stopped for a moment, looking at the people waiting for appointments.

"Counting the house, George?"

He nodded. "Business is getting good, all right. Every satisfied customer—client, rather—means a dozen more customers."

"Clients."

"Yes, clients." They went down the long hall behind the reception room, stopped before one of the compartments. Linden held the curtain aside for Jane. She looked in first.

"There's someone in there."

"Yes." Linden motioned her in.

The man in the chair didn't see them. His eyes were opened wide,

staring at the wall where the wheel turned steadily. Jane watched the wheel for a moment. It was fascinating the way the color bands first caught the eyes, then, as they revolved, made the eyes follow them to the center of the wheel where the small bright light shone so brightly. It hurt the eyes a little, it was so bright, so bright, and she never wanted to look at anything else again, just watch the little bright—

She couldn't see it any more. Jane became aware that someone was shaking her. She couldn't see anything.

"Jane!" Linden was beside her, still shaking her gently, one hand in front of her eyes. "Jane! . . . That's better." She heard him laugh. Then she was wide awake again, looking toward him. He took his hand from before her eyes.

"I'm sorry, George. I know better, of course. But I just looked at the wheel and it got me, before—"

"Easy!"

"What?"

"You were starting to look at it again."

"All right. I'll be careful."

She kept her eyes away from the wheel, looked back at the man in the chair. He was well past middle age, paunchy, well dressed. He reminded her a little of a frog, the way his eyes were almost popping while he stared at the wheel, and the way the lines were almost gone out of his face, his face smoothed out and softened because of his drooping lower jaw.

She could hear the loud-speaker in the wall now.

"—need anyone. Any time you need anyone. Need anyone. Whenever someone can help you. If you're in pain. In pain. Accident and no help around. Whenever you need anyone. Need anyone. Whenever—"

She listened to the voice over and over, and knew it was only a recording and couldn't get her unless she looked at the wheel.

"—subconscious inside you must cause automatic reaction. Your wristband will give you protection. Your wristband can save you. Whenever—"

Jane looked down at the plain metal band that circled her own wrist. At the stud that need only be pressed— There were some things that Basic Assurances couldn't help, no matter how hard the stud was pressed. Sometimes you could need help and—

She shook her head. This wasn't helping. Jane turned as the curtain

moved, watched the red-haired young girl in white come in, cross briskly to the wall, and stop the wheel. She realized the voice from the speaker had stopped.

The man in the chair was clearing his throat, blinking his eyes, and already looking sheepish, apologetic.

"Must have fallen asleep. I was watching that confounded wheel, and—"

He stopped, uncertain of what *had* happened. The nurse smiled at him.

"You were meant to fall asleep, Mr. Bronson. While you were asleep you were given all the information you'll require to operate the wristband. Now if you'll—"

Mr. Bronson was out of the cubicle, on his way to Band-fitting and Consignment Accounting, when the girl in white brought another man in, seated him in the same chair, and started the wheel again.

They stood in the hall and watched the steady flow of clients in and out of the compartments, wondering going in, bewildered coming out. Only a few of the clients were women.

Jane giggled suddenly, turned to Linden. "It seems so silly. They come here and pay you ten per cent of their entire worth as a retainer, and all you do is confuse them."

"It straightens out by the time we release them. Remember when you went through? We've got the system a lot better now."

"I remember. I was confused all the way through and getting rather angry. Then, after the lecture at the end, I began to feel all right. Safe and secure in the motherly arms of Basic Assurances."

Linden nodded, not really listening. "If we could get them to come during the night, we wouldn't have so much of a problem. We could go on a twenty-four-hour shift here. The way business is coming in now, we'll have to open another place. And now isn't the time to expand."

"Why not? With all this business coming in—"

Linden started to tell her about his trip to Washington, didn't. "We're not making any money. Will keeps putting everything he can into trade material. We just keep enough out to take care of overhead."

"George—I want to go through the portal with you sometime."

"No— Well, I don't see why not, at that. I'm going through later today. Maybe—"

"I'm sure it'll be all right with Will."

Will nodded. "No reason why Jane can't. Are you sure you want to take her with you this time, though?"

"Why not?"

"Hm-m-m. No reason, I guess. You're going to have to tell Phlan what President Warner said."

"What?"

"We have to. Warner didn't know it, of course, but his offer wasn't to us, really. Not to Basic Assurances. It was to the Phlen."

Linden looked at his friend closely. "It's all right to lean over backwards, Will. You're built that way. But now you're falling over backwards."

Badick smiled. "If you can, put it so Phlan will reject the idea. If he doesn't, we'll have to talk him out of it. Try to make him see the Phlen would be cat's-paws and the chestnuts would be very hot ones."

"All right, Will. I know what a cat's-paw is, I guess."

"You should. You're beginning to look like one."

"Which I should."

The big bookcase in the wall of the office swung back, revealing the silver gridlike doorway built into the wall. Linden took Jane's arm. She held back, suddenly.

"This is— I always thought it was something like a radio. Electronics and all, I mean."

Badick nodded. "This is just the portal end of it. The next two offices were ripped out to make room for the electronics that drive it. If it's tubes you want, there are over six thousand of them just in the portal circuit. Happy?"

"Hm-m-m. Let's go?"

Linden hung back then. "You're sure you feel up to it, Jane?"

"Of course. Let's go."

They stepped into the grid doorway. Linden was prepared for, hardly felt, the inner wrench as they went through. He remembered it, what it was like the first few times, when he realized Jane was staggering under the shock.

He couldn't reach her, quite. She was beside him, untouchable, a vague outline in the rosy haze beyond the portal.

"I'm all right now." He knew she had spoken the words, though he'd heard nothing, could not make out her lips, but felt the words in his mind.

"It can't hurt you, darling. I can't help you now, though. You'll have to shift for yourself. We can't touch each other, or anything."

"I'm all right." The words seemed to come from a long way off, then strengthened. "You're not talking to me. You're thinking at me. That's what I'm doing now. Can you . . . hear me?"

"Yes. Yes, Jane."

"It's easier to think words than try to talk them. This isn't the other . . . this isn't where the Phlen live, is it?"

"No. This is Inbetween. This is where we meet. Phlan, the permanent representative of the Phlen, lives here."

"Is that his name?"

"It's just what we call him. Names—they don't mean much. Here he comes."

Linden first, then Jane, felt the presence of another, drawing closer to them. Then it was beside them, and Jane could see only a bulge in the rosy haze where she knew Phlan must be.

Gradually she became better aware of him, though not with her eyes. She became aware of what he *should* look like if she could see him.

He was man-sized, but there any resemblance to humanity ended. He was leathery, rubbery, from the dome of his head— She felt an inner gasp as she got a better conception of what Phlan was like. He was built like a cone with the top rounded off and bulged into what must be a head. A head with a mouth but without hair or eyes or nose or ears. His "body" seemed smooth and unbroken except for the four arms that came out of it on the upper part not far from the head. Apparently he was without feet.

She felt the thought: "Linden, I hope you have come with a promise of more copper. We must have more lattices."

"No, Phlan. There will be copper, though, in a few weeks."

Phlan's returning thought was derisive. "A few weeks to your people. That is many generations to us. Many generations."

"I'm sorry, Phlan. You must also understand that many generations to you are but a few weeks to us. That we must have time to get the copper and have it made into the proper strips, and then delivered."

"Why did you come?"

Jane thought she caught a flash of resentment in Linden's mind, one that was quickly smothered.

"I have an offer from our government, Phlan. We are faced with a

war in which there will be atomic projectiles and bombs. I think you understand?"

"I understand the formulation, yes."

"We face the threat of having many of those atomic bombs dropped on our cities. Our government would like you to handle them."

"Your government is now aware of our existence?"

"The offer was made to Basic Assurances, Phlan," Linden answered.

"How much copper would there be?"

Linden hesitated. "All you can use, almost. More than you've ever had from Basic Assurances. Probably more than you could ever get from us."

"We will accept."

"No, Phlan. You don't realize what it means. The bombs would go off in your world. Probably as soon as you could grapple them through. It would mean the lives of the grappling crew, at least."

"Six Phlen. The price would be low. We could evacuate any other Phlen from the vicinity before we brought the bombs through."

"Yes. Basic Assurances is against a nation's solving its war troubles by bringing a neutral world into the conflict. There is no reason the Phlen should suffer for our mistakes."

"The suffering would be light, Linden, compared to what our gains in copper would be. How long will it be before the first bombs would have to be grappled?"

"In our time? Perhaps weeks or months, or even years. The war might start any time, or hold off."

"Then we would like the same form of payment as Basic Assurances uses."

"I don't— I see. The United States would pay a retainer to you, in copper, for which you would agree to take care of the bombs as they come?"

"Yes. The longer before the bombs come, the more copper we would get."

"I suppose so. I can say nothing, as I'll have to talk to Badick."

Jane realized that Phlan was leaving them, drifting off into the haze without effort.

"Is that all?"

"For the moment. Let's go back— No, don't try to walk. Just think of the portal and let yourself drift to it."

Badick closed the bookcase behind them.

"Phlan wants to do it," Linden told him. "I didn't argue."

"We'll see. I want to hear from Hammond before I do anything."

"Yes. Jane!" Linden took her by the arm and helped her to a chair.

"All right now, George. Just felt a little rocky. There's no time there, is there?"

"Inbetween? No. That's what we call it, by the way: Inbetween."

"That's cute."

"We didn't mean it to be. We've just never thought of any other name."

"There's time, all right, Jane," Badick assured her. "But it's a lot different from ours or from the Phlen's. It's a time outside of time. Phlan has been there for a great many of his generations, staying there just to contact us. Messengers come from his world, bringing him the latest news."

Jane shuddered. "It must be lonely by himself there. His wife, children, relatives— He would have all of those?"

"Yes. But if someone didn't stay there it would mean we would have to contact a new generation every time we talked to them. Phlan acts as coordinator, never aging in Inbetween."

The telephone buzzed shortly. Badick picked it up, listened for a moment, then put the instrument down.

"Hammond. The government experimental portal gave them some trouble."

"How?"

"They sent six men through. None came back. Then while they were fussing around with it, the portal disappeared on them."

"Ungh!"

Jane looked at the two men in perplexity.

"What does that mean?"

"The six men went through the portal to the Phlen dimension. Apparently the government missed the idea of Inbetween. The Phlen got the six men as they came through, then grappled the portal through. It wouldn't have occurred to them to have it anchored."

"Got them? But what would they do?"

"Hold them for knowledge. When we first discovered the Phlen they were a semicivilized race. They had the capacity but not the actual civilization."

"But Phlan seemed—"

"Well, they had more than the capacity, actually, but they didn't have

the world a civilization could exist on readily. Their world isn't like ours. It's like Inbetween."

"You mean they have to live in *that* all the time?"

"It's worse. Inbetween is more like our world, in some ways, than it is the Phlen-world. Nothing is solid, everything is mist and haze, and their 'farm lands' must be followed by the farmers, lest they drift away from them entirely."

"Nothing is solid? Nothing?"

"Not as we understand it. Our experiments show us that the haze and mist of their world can be used to make anything that we make in our own world. However, the Phlen still lack the understanding to handle their material."

"No wonder they have difficulties in setting up a civilization!"

"Yes. We contacted them, as I said. When we went through the first time, we weren't expecting anything, really, and we found the Phlen, found we could communicate with them.

"They needed our help in establishing a civilization. By experiment we found that copper lattices could be made that would give them solid bases on which to center their communities.

"We couldn't finance the copper they needed. We didn't think our own world was ready for contact with them. So we took advantage of the difference in time rates. You know about that."

"A little. Basic Assurances supplies a client with a wristband and hypnotic instructions. If he's ever in trouble, needs help, he presses the stud. I suppose the Phlen come then."

"Yes. The wristband sends a tone to listeners on the Phlen-world. They can use the tone for location. They find the place in their own world corresponding to the client's position in this. Then they break through with the grapplers we've supplied to them."

"But how can they help? If they're only partly civilized, what can they do?"

"We've trained many Phlen as instructors, and they've trained squads. If a client on a hunting trip gets acute appendicitis, and there's no doctor, he presses the stud on his wristband.

"It's only a fraction of a second to him before help gets there. Perhaps a month or more to a squad of Phlens. They don't know what the trouble is, of course, and have to be prepared for any emergency.

"The client never knows just what happens. If it's something like appendicitis, the grapplers give him an anesthetic, pull him through Inbe-

tween, operate, let him recuperate under hypnosis they can put him in with their sense of perception. Then they put him back where he was.

"The client wakes up a few seconds, earth time, after he's touched the stud on the wristband. He's well, his appendix is gone, and he's got the scar to show for it.

"The grappling squad has noted the number of the wristband, and we get that, through Phlan, with the information. We send the client the bill for services rendered."

Jane nodded. "I've heard of some of those seeming miracles. But the Phlen can't see?"

"They can see almost as well as we can, though in a somewhat different way. They don't have our eyes, but they have their perception."

"I felt as though I had a perception sense in Inbetween. The Phlen can do anything with the grapplers, then?"

"Almost. If your car is plunging over a cliff, press your stud. Before you hit, a Phlen squad will grapple it back to the road. Accidents, operations, fires, drownings—Basic Assurances has saved clients from every possible misfortune, and the client never knows what's going on."

Jane shook her head. "There's so much I don't understand. How can they see through into this world to know what to do?"

"We built scanners that look through— We probably could make ones that would see from our world into theirs, but we've never had need for them."

"And your only payment to them is in copper strips?"

"Almost. That's what they need most, to give them a foundation for a city civilization. We could never supply them with food, of course. They can eat some of our foods, but we'd never be able to grow things as fast as they can eat them."

"But it doesn't seem right. Using them for service like that. If they want copper, it should be traded to them, as equals."

"That could be done if they had something to offer in trade besides service—and if the world was ready to accept them. As it is, bringing the Phlen to public recognition now would mean opening new frontiers for the nations of this world to fight over."

"Yes, I can see that."

The phone buzzed. Linden reached for it, held it to his ear for a moment, then put it down.

"Hammond again. How does he do it?"

"Do what?"

"Get the information he does. As soon as he does. He says the Berendese government military is confident they have a perfect defense against the atom bomb."

Badick looked at his watch. "It can't be the same. It hasn't been long enough since you talked to Phlan. He couldn't have—"

"No, not since then. It means he knew about it before I went to him."

"That's likely. They've been using scanners for spying, of course. It would have to be out of Inbetween, though."

"No. Not if they've got any sort of recording device. Lucky we're protected here. I guess this is the hatching of the egg, all right."

Jane looked at the two men, puzzled.

"Egg?"

"We knew we were heading for trouble sooner or later. The Phlen have too many ideas, and we're moving too slowly for them. They're ambitious now, want their civilization, and they don't want it to come through Basic Assurances. They're getting greedy, want all they can get."

"There'll be trouble, then?"

Badick spread his palms. "There shouldn't have been any way they could make it. We tried to take precautions. We can shut off the grapplers. But they've got the government portal. They can go on from there without us.

"If they figure out how to power their grapplers from the portal, there isn't much we can do."

"We'll be at their mercy?"

"Not completely. We've taken precautions we never thought we'd really need. But they can make it rough for us."

"Fight us? Kill us?"

"They could do that. We wouldn't have much to fight back with. We could invade them, but we couldn't supply the invading army. The logistics would be impossible. We couldn't make supplies as fast as they would be used. We couldn't replace men as fast as they would be put out of action just from old age. Unless we could conquer immediately, of course, and there wouldn't be much hope for that. We'd be fighting in a world too alien, too little understood. But their weapon will be blackmail."

Linden faced Phlan through the rosy haze of Inbetween.

"That has to be our plan," Phlan admitted. "Basic Assurances can't give us what we need. We contacted the Berendese government, and they promised us a copper retainer. We'll get the same from your government. And others."

"That will be just the beginning of it, won't it?"

"Yes. When they're accustomed to paying, we'll ask more from them. Of course, now that we have the portal, it will be easy to keep the countries stirred up, on the verge of war. It isn't a policy with which I am in sympathy, but our own cause must be considered first. Military secrets developed by one country will be sold to another. For copper. Later on, for other supplies. For technicians to train our people in what they must know."

"You'll force us to fight back."

"No, there will be no war between us. Your methods developed for Basic Assurances will give us too much power."

"You'll bleed us to death," Linden warned. "We haven't the population to supply yours with all its needs. Mass production will mean nothing against the terrible consumption rate of your people."

"Not bleed you, Linden. We'll milk you. It will all work out quite well."

"We'll run from you, Phlan. We won't be earthbound much longer. If we have to take all of our people to the other planets to get away from you, we'll do that. You won't be able to stop us."

"We wouldn't try to stop you, Linden. You'll find the new relations will be almost on the same basis as with Basic Assurances. We will provide a service for your people, and you will give us what we need. Our wisest leaders have discussed it thoroughly and found it morally right."

Linden saw no hope there. They would be able to justify all they did, to themselves. If they were in need, they would create a situation in which they could be of service.

"You won't try to stop us from going to the planets? Not even if we all go?"

"No, not even if you all could go. Not even if it meant your getting away from us entirely. But it's no difference, actually, to us, whether you live on this island or another."

"It clicked, then," Linden told Badick. "I always wondered what Phlan meant by referring to earth and other planets as islands. That's

all they are to the Phlen, islands set down in the midst of their world. Their world must take in all the solar system—and perhaps beyond—dotted with islands of another dimension that are the planets."

Badick nodded. "That's what I've suspected. They don't live on a space that's comparable to earth's position. Their world lies between the planets. If we could lay copper lattice tracks in their world, we could walk from here to Venus."

"Fort said something like that."

Linden frowned, reached for *The Book of the Damned.* He thumbed pages for a minute. "If one could break away from the traditions of the geographers, one might walk and walk and come to Mars, and then find Mars continuous with Jupiter?"

Badick smiled grimly. "I don't think he was talking about the same thing. Though the Phlen-world would explain a lot of the things that puzzled Fort. However, walking wouldn't be required, of course, nor even copper lattices. Remember how it was when we were in the Phlen-world? You just wished to move, and you did move."

"Yes. They've got us. Right where we put ourselves, too. Where's Jane?"

"She left while you were going into the portal. She was rather tired."

"I know." Linden picked up the telephone, dialed a number. "Dr. Stevens, please. . . . Steve, this is George Linden. . . . Fine. . . . How's Jane doing? . . . No, Steve, don't give it to me like that. . . . Tell me. . . . Oh! . . . Yes. . . . All right, Steve. Thanks." He dropped the phone back to its cradle. He looked older and tired.

"What did Steve say, George?"

"Same thing. She's getting worse and there's nothing to do. Have you checked Reynolds lately?"

"Yes. This morning. He came to me, as a matter of fact. The ICM came up with an answer."

"*The* answer." Hope showed now in Linden's face.

"*An* answer. He had a complete set of equations, and I sent them on to Harkness for analysis."

"But what did they mean?"

Badick shrugged. "Not too much, to me. My mathematics doesn't go far enough. I gathered that if there is an earth time as we know it, and if there is a Phlen-world time, there should be a Minor."

"That's all we need, then. The equations should show us how to get there."

Badick smiled ruefully. "Yes, they should. But that's assuming that the other two factors exist in actuality."

"You know they do!"

"Yes, we *know* they do. If the mathematics bears us out, it will be a cinch."

Linden rubbed his knuckles against the side of his head. "Ungh! We know that you and I exist. We assume that Basic Assurances exists. If we can prove that Basic Assurances doesn't exist, then you and I don't exist. Is that the same reasoning?"

"No, but it's the same line. We'll have to wait and see what Harkness says."

"Is he pushing it?"

"Sure. He promised a reply this afternoon."

"O.K. I'll sit and twiddle my thumbs."

"No. You'll set up a crew to work Basic Assurances from the fringes of the Phlen-world and Inbetween. Here's the modulation pattern Harkness worked out for the squad cars. You know what it means: the men won't actually be either in Inbetween or Phlen-world. Impress it on them that they've got to keep the modulators going at all times except when they're grappling.

"Get work going, then shut off the Phlen grapplers."

"All right, Will."

"We're going to have to put out a lot of cash to start operating, but we'll make some money around here for a change. This'll be the first time everything hasn't been going to the Phlen."

"And Phlan?"

"Chop him off. There's nothing else we can do. We have to come first, now."

"About time."

"Maybe. Reynolds has all the tab cards. He ought to be able to sort them and run them off in an hour. Take this list of squad components and have him sort them, too. Better get several of the girls to help telephoning men as soon as Reynolds can get the list."

"Sure."

Linden was back at five. He took one look at Badick.

"You've been up to something."

"Lots of things. Harkness came by. Minor exists, all right. He's standing over a couple of technicians, converting the stand-by portal."

Linden sat down, feeling suddenly limp and tired.

"It'll work, then?"

"Harkness isn't saying that. He hardly spoke to me; you know how he is. The way he acted, I think he's pretty sure it will do what we want."

"That's a relief. What else? You've got something inside."

"Yes. But how did you make out?"

"First squad went through. I sent Hammond with them through the big portal. They've got everything from sewing kits to fire-fighting equipment. Hammond can get them used to things. The extra men I sent with them can be seeded into the other squads as they form."

"All right. Better cut the grapplers."

"I did. The Phlen can't get through without the government portal."

"Good. They've got some other worries from now on."

"You did it, then?"

"Yes. I keep telling myself I didn't have any choice. I still feel like a mass executioner."

"It might not work." Linden looked at Badick, looked away quickly at the sight of the now gray face.

"I don't know." His voice was weary and there was the sound of defeat in it. "I don't know. A little, I hope it won't work. Mostly, I hope it will. We've got to win, and win fast."

"Yes. It should work. I think your reasoning was good."

It was a moment before Badick said anything. "It was your idea as much as mine."

"No, it wasn't, Will. Remember—" Linden stopped, looked at Badick. "I see. Someone will get the credit."

"It isn't that, George."

"The devil it isn't. You're thinking of giving me the credit. Same old cat's-paw."

"I don't want the credit."

"Do you think I do? There have been worse wanton destroyers in history than the Vandals, but they got stuck with the name. Governor Gerry gave his name to 'gerrymander.' Captain Boycott gave his name to a cause. Thomas Bowdler contributed to 'bowdlerize.' Charles Lynch and the lynch law. Quisling and—"

"All right, George."

"All right, nothing. Mankind will have other examples of this in the next thousand and ten thousand years. I don't want 'lindenize' to become part of the language: a word synonymous with destruction of intelligent races by using inferior races as—"

"I know. Cat's-paws."

"Yes. 'Badickize' them if you wish, but leave me out of it."

"All right, George. Sooner or later it will come out. We'll have to think of something before then."

"We'll think of something. I'm going over to the stand-by portal. Coming?"

"No. I've had enough for the day. I'm going home."

"Right."

It was two in the morning before the last wire was changed, the last new tube socket in place.

Harkness wiped more oil into his face, grinned at Linden.

"All set. We'll try it tomorrow."

"Hey! What's wrong with now?"

"Who's going in? I'm not. I can't ask these men"—he waved at the technicians—"to."

"I'm going. You knew that."

Harkness grinned again. "Go to it, son. She's all yours."

"It'll work?"

"Should. If you bang your head on the wall, then the portal isn't working."

"I'll go slow."

Linden started through, walking slowly, keeping his eyes on the plaster wall behind the portal. If it worked, he'd never reach the wall.

He felt the wrench, sharper than when he went through the portal to Inbetween. He felt the floor give way beneath him, the jar, and the buckling of the knees as he dropped several feet to solid footing once more.

He looked ahead of him. Here was no mist of Inbetween or Phlenworld. This was much like the earth he knew. The sky was blue above him, the grass green beneath his feet, and trees—

He felt the rough pull on his shoulder, started to turn. Then he realized he was caught tight in a harness. He struggled against it briefly, then felt himself pulled up.

There was a wrench, then he was pulled again. He stumbled back. Someone caught and steadied him, turned him around, and started removing the harness.

Harkness. Linden blinked, looked around the room. The technicians were gone. He saw Badick close to him, Hammond farther away, and Reynolds in the background, holding a handful of the inevitable tab cards.

"I was coming back, boys, really I was. What's the idea?"

"How long were you there, George?" Harkness had the harness off him, was leaning forward eagerly. "How long did it seem?"

"I just got there. Three or four seconds, perhaps. Five at the most. Why?"

Harkness grinned happily. "It took us a week to get you out of there. It was my fault. I just stood there for a while, like a fool, waiting for you to come back. Then I realized that if the portal had put you in Minor, we'd have to pull you out, or wait the rest of our lives while you turned around to start back."

"A week— It seemed just those few seconds."

"We had to build a scanner to locate you, then a grappler and a harness to get at you. Then we had a tough time fishing. The grappler slowed down to nothing once it hit Minor time. We had to maneuver the harness for three days to slip it over you. Now I know what a Basic Assurances' rescue squad goes through."

"The harness came so fast I couldn't fight it."

"All right. You've got your Minor."

Linden was just realizing it. He turned to Hammond. "Get hold of Jane and have her come down."

Hammond winked. "She's on her way, George."

"Good. We'll shove her in first. Then others. I've got the plans worked out. I can go in when she does and—"

"No, George."

Linden swung toward Badick. "What do you mean?"

"No one goes in like that. No one except people like Jane and those who'll be needed to help them."

Linden stared at Badick, not saying anything.

"Sorry, George. But think it over. You go in because you want to be with Jane. Then her mother and father want to be near her. Maybe her sister. Then maybe her sister's boy friend. Then maybe his family. It'll

be that way with everybody. Send one person like Jane in, and a dozen perfectly well people will drag along."

"All right. The land can support them. It's like earth, and—"

"We saw it through the scanner. It looks better than earth. If everyone goes there, where will the advantage be?

"We have to make full use of the time differences. Jane, and others who need medical attention beyond present knowledge, can go there. They'll be almost in suspended animation, as far as earth is concerned. On earth we'll go about our daily tasks. Gradually, research will produce knowledge that will help those in Minor."

"But— You're right, of course. But I can die of old age while Jane is spending a short while, to her, in Minor."

"Yes— So you'll push research that will cure her, won't you?"

"More than that. I'll start a research center in Phlen-world. A few days, weeks, earth time, and—" Linden stopped abruptly and then looked at Badick questioningly.

Badick nodded. "Hammond knows of a few things that have happened while you were in Minor. Phlan went through to Washington. Right through the barrier into Warner's office. Just about scared the old boy to death.

"Phlan pulled him into Inbetween and talked turkey. Warner bought in, but hasn't released any information. Apparently he's going to get the money out of some special appropriation. . . . Hammond says our Chief Executive got a really nasty shock out of Phlan."

Linden grinned. "O.K. Maybe I'm even with him. The things I had to sit and take from the old—Jane!" He hurried forward and took her hand as she came in the door.

"Jane, I want to put you through this portal for a few minutes. Other people will be along pretty soon to keep you company. They'll bring food and supplies—"

"But George . . . George!"

Linden kissed her briefly on the cheek, steered her through the portal, watched her disappear.

"I forgot to warn her about the drop. Well, it isn't bad. We can take a month before sending what I promised, and she'll still be standing there, blinking her eyes."

Badick caught his eye, motioned with his head.

The two men left the room together, heading for their office.

"How is it?"

"Good, George. Basic Assurances is rolling smoothly. We've started expanding, and I'm considering some branch offices. I'm hiring as fast as I can find suitable people."

"All right. How about the Phlen?"

"We haven't been able to get hold of Phlan. We developed some scanners, but they're useless against the time rate. All we get is mist. I think Phlan is some place in Inbetween. You could probably reach him."

"I'll try."

They reached the office, went in, and swung the bookcase back.

Linden peered through the rosy mist, searching, not remembering. Then he closed his eyes, letting his sense of perception reach out, sharpen, call through the haze.

He became aware of Phlan's approach and thought it was with more haste than was usual.

"Linden. Why did you come?"

"To exchange thoughts."

"It is well, Linden. I have been wishing for you."

"I am here."

"We have decided to send a colony to your world, Linden, to live and learn and observe."

Linden hesitated before commenting. "It will not be comfortable in our world. The sense of perception is almost useless. You will not be able to move about except with the use of attachments to your body."

"Still, we wish it."

Linden caught the underlying urgency in the thought that Phlan tried to keep casual.

"How many are there in this colony, Phlan?"

"About two thousand."

"Where are they?"

Linden felt that Phlan tried to stop the thought, but it was too late. "Here . . . in Inbetween."

"So— We refuse permission."

"Linden! Remember, we can make things severe for your people."

"No. You are not asking for a colony, Phlan. You seek sanctuary."

It was long before Phlan answered. "Yes, Linden, we beg sanctuary."

Linden felt sympathy. "This two thousand—"

"There are no other Phlen left."

"I'm sorry, Phlan. But your threat was too great. You forced us to it."

"I understand, now. . . . Linden, we had no choice against them. At first we ignored the few we perceived. They multiplied with amazing rapidity, attacked our farms, took our food so that our peoples starved.

"At first they destroyed. Then they seemed to learn. There were mutations. They developed an alert, savage intelligence. They took over our farms, developed them, fought off our counterattacks. They used their teeth and claws against us, then learned to fashion weapons that killed at a distance. They slaughtered us even for food.

"They became much like you humans, Linden, in the way they built and fought and thought."

"We did not expect them to develop intelligence, Phlan, but we thought they would cause a diversion."

"They are horrors. They have learned to fashion the mist material. Whatever you can make on your world, Linden, I think they can make on Phlen-world. They were your rats, of course?"

"Yes. A cunning, destructive rodent on our world. A conqueror on yours. Stay here, Phlan, and I will talk to Badick."

"Warner made the deal with them, Badick. Let him supply the colony with land and food, and figure out what to do with them. We can make a guarantee on atomic warfare. We can make projectors to hurl bombs into Phlen-world."

Badick shook his head. "I've been dodging it, George. Basic Assurances will give basic assurance from now on. We'll guarantee peace-on-earth. You can start planning your research center on Phlen-world."

"Yeah? All right, I'll get the big-game hunters."

"Who?"

"The big-game hunters to kill the tigers."

"What tigers?"

"The ones who kill the wolves who kill the dogs who kill the cats who kill the rats we sent against the Phlen."

Badick shook his head, then laughed.

"We won't be needing all of that, George. Phlan told you those rats had developed intelligence, a civilization not unlike mankind's. They've mutated, George, remember that."

"Yes. But they're still savage, still wanting to fight and kill. You'd deal with them? With rats?"

"Of course. We'll give them the benefits of a more advanced civilization, George, and let them work out their own destiny. All the benefits: gunpowder and dope and atomic warfare and bacteria and poison gas. A few of our weeks, and—"

George nodded.

Fritz Leiber, Jr.

BUSINESS OF KILLING

In infinite time, all varieties of worlds can exist, as has been pointed out elsewhere. Here a pacifist named Whitlow discovers a world which he grossly misinterprets at first. Moreover, his knowledge of human nature is just as poor as his judgment, but he remains alive because of his ability to escape when the going gets tough.

Actually, the civilization pictured on this alternate world is close to what our own might be if certain trends here were to continue unchecked. This makes it an uncomfortable tale to read—which is, I am sure, just what its author meant it to be.

THE room was small and undistinguished, yet there was the indelible impression that power radiated to and from it, that it was the focal point of vast, far-flung, tension-fraught, and crucial activities. Its general appearance—that of a hastily stripped living room—clashed with the large, efficient, and centrally located desk from which radiated a number of ribbons sheathing conductors and adhering unobtrusively to the floor. A strong possibility: that it was the temporary headquarters of an organization engaged in a critical enterprise.

The man who had said they might call him Whitlow sat in a corner. His face was long, bony, and big-jawed, but the effect was of fanaticism and obstinacy, even sulkiness, rather than strength. He rubbed his hands in a way that was meant to be amiable, very much the master of the situation although it was he who was being interviewed. His gaze wandered inquisitively. He looked, despite his pseudogeniality, as if he could make his expression go all stern in a moment, and he wore high-mindedness like an admiral's uniform. Yet behind it all lurked a hint of the brat who knows where the candy is hidden and who knows, furthermore, that he is immune from interference.

Saturnly and Neddar sat behind the desk. Or, rather, Saturnly sat behind most of it, while Neddar was tucked in at a corner, his nimble fingers poised above the noiseless keys of a hidden lightwriter, which was at present hooked up with a little panel that stared slantwise at Saturnly from the center of the desk.

Saturnly was obviously all appetite and will power. Heavy-jowled

bullethead set on a torso that had expanded with its owner's enterprises. Eyes in which there was little subtlety but worlds of dogged power. A man who lived to outshout, outpound, outorganize, and outwit. A great driving voraciousness, joyously dedicated to the task of making men and money work.

Yet deep underneath was the suggestion of an iron and admirable integrity; one felt that in a pinch the man would unfailingly stand up for the things he believed in and lived by, whatever the cost and no matter how tawdry they might be.

Neddar just as obviously had no appetite at all except for his own peculiar whims, and subtlety fairly danced a jig in his liquid brown eyes. Yet he was Saturnly's equal in energy and tireless competence, but based on intellectual rather than emotional drives. A small, lithe man, very quick in all ways, young, but with a full black beard. Lips brimming with humor and mockery, though now carefully composed. A human catalyst, a court jester turned private secretary, a superassistant.

Their relationship was that of crocodile and crocodile bird, or—more accurately—shark and pilot fish.

The most arresting difference between them and the Whitlow person related to clothing. Although superficially similar, there was the suggestion of different epochs of fashion—or of some even wider gulf.

They watched him as a fat tom and a brainy kitten watch a mouse just out of reach.

Whitlow said, "I repeat, the means whereby I came here are immaterial to our discussion. Suffice it to say that alternate time streams exist, resulting from time bifurcations in the not-too-distant past, and that I possess the means of traveling between them."

Saturnly extended his great paws soothingly. He said, "Now, now, Mr. Whitlow, don't excite your—"

He choked off. Neddar's fingers flickered, although no other part of his anatomy moved, and there glowed up at Saturnly the following warning: "WATCH YOUR STEP! It's probably true. Remember, he turned up where he couldn't have."

Neddar said, "Mr. Saturnly is concerned that you don't overtax yourself after your strenuous ordeal."

Mollified, Whitlow continued in his unpleasantly high-pitched and mincing voice, "I am, among other things, a pacifist. I am visiting the alternate worlds in search of one that has learned how to do away with the horrid scourge of war, in order to bring back the precious

knowledge to my erring co-timers. I see in yours no uniforms, no headlines detailing carnage, no posters blaring propaganda, nor any of the subtler indications that war is just over or will soon break out. I assume, therefore, that you have been able to eliminate this dreadful business of killing—"

During this speech a stifled inward churning had been apparent in Saturnly. Now he exploded, "Just who do you think you are, anyway? Coming here and insulting me—John Saturnly—this way! Why, you dirty Red—"

He chewed air furiously. A new message glowed on the panel: "You big ape! This guy's got something. If we offend him, we may not get it."

To Whitlow, Neddar said, "Mr. Saturnly misunderstood you. He is a businessman and has a very keen sense of the dignity and worth of his work. He thought you were referring specifically to business, whereas, of course, you were only using the words in a figurative sense."

At the same time he made furtive motions indicating that Saturnly, though well intentioned, was rather slow of understanding.

Whitlow inquired, "Just what is the nature of Mr. Saturnly's business?"

A grumble of explosions shook the night.

"Blasting operations," said Neddar. "I don't mean his business—that comprises a variety of enterprises and has many ramifications. It happens, moreover, to be very closely concerned with that matter on which you are desirous of obtaining information."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Whitlow. "I appreciate the attention you've shown in bringing me here. But I could just as well follow my usual procedure of drifting around and taking things in gradually."

"A needless waste of your time, which I am sure must be valuable. In Mr. Saturnly you have found the fountainhead. It is his enterprises that have eliminated from this world the terrible and chaotic socio-political upheavals of war."

The explosions continued. There came the vindictive drone of high-speed aircraft. Eagerness and doubt fought in Whitlow's face.

"The night freight," said Neddar. "We are a very industrious people —very businesslike in all matters. And that leads me to another consideration. Mr. Saturnly and I are in a position to provide you with information which you greatly desire. You, on the other hand, pos-

sess a very fascinating power—that of passing between time streams."

"Follow my lead," glowed on the panel, but it was unnecessary. Saturnly understood things like this without thinking.

He said, "Yes, how about a little deal, Mr. Whitlow? We tell you how to prevent . . . uh . . . war. You tell us how to cross time."

Whitlow rolled the idea on his tongue, as if it were a new but not necessarily unpleasant kind of cough syrup. "An interesting proposal. I could, of course, ultimately obtain the same information independently—"

"But not so adequately," said Neddar quickly, his eyes flashing. "And not soon enough. I take it that there is some particular war which you desire to stop or prevent." A tiny green light began to blink on Saturnly's desk. Neddar thumbed a square marked "No." It continued to blink. He thumbed the square once more, then resumed, "So speed must be your paramount consideration, Mr. Whitlow."

"Yes . . . ah . . . perhaps. And if I decide to impart my power to you, I would require assurances that it be used only for the most high-minded purposes."

"Absolutely," said Saturnly, bringing down his palm as if it were a seal and his desk the document.

A door flicked open and a blonde young lady catapulted in. She squealed, "I know you're in conference, J. S., but this is a crisis!"

Saturnly made frantic gestures of warning. Neddar, after one appraising glance, wasted no time in such maneuvers.

She struck the pose of one announcing catastrophe. "There's been a strike of front-line operatives!" she managed to wail—then Neddar was rushing her out. The slamming door punctuated her woeful: "And just when you'd come down to supervise the big push, J. S.!"

"A lovely girl, Mr. Whitlow, but hysterical," said Saturnly. "She talks . . . what's that word? . . . figuratively."

His blandness was lost on Whitlow. "Just what is the nature of your business, Mr. Saturnly?" The voice had acquired an inquisitorial edge.

Saturnly groped for a reply, looking around for Neddar as a dripping man looks for a towel.

"Of course," Whitlow continued, a puzzled note creeping in, "I assumed that there was no war here, because of the absence of war atmosphere, to which I am very sensitive. But—"

"You took the words out of my mouth," said Saturnly, clutching at the straw. "No war atmosphere—no war. You proved it yourself."

But another door flicked open, and it is doubtful if even Neddar could have stemmed the agitated tide of the small crowd that poured through it.

Of individuals of major importance—the rest wore badges—there seemed to be three. The first was tall and had been, at some prior date, dapper and competent.

He said, "I'm through, J. S. I can't do anything with them. They've gotten beyond reason." He threw himself down in a chair.

The second was short and bristling. He said, "Just let me turn the artillery on them, J. S., and I'll blast them out of their sit-down!"

"You and who else?" inquired the third, who was of medium height, lumpy, and wearing a dirty raincoat. "Just try that, and you'll see the biggest sympathetic walkout you ever tried to toss tear gas at."

They disregarded Saturnly's herculean efforts to shush them as completely as they did the presence of Whitlow.

"J. S., their demands are impossible!" the second man barked over the babbling.

The third man planted himself in front of Saturnly's desk. He stated, "Twenty cents more an hour and time-and-a-half in the mud, with pay retroactive to day before yesterday's rainstorm."

"It isn't mud!" the second man rebutted fiercely. "It isn't sufficiently gelatinous. I've had it analyzed."

Two studious-looking men in the background bobbed their heads in affirmation.

The third man dug his hand in his raincoat pocket, stepped forward, and slapped down a black, gooey handful in the middle of Saturnly's desk.

"No mud, eh?" he said, watching it ooze. "What do you say, Saturnly?"

The first man shuddered and cringed in his chair.

With a sweep of his bearlike arm, Saturnly sent the mud splattering off his desk as he came around it.

"You dirty gutter stooge!" he roared. "So two dollars an hour isn't good enough for your good-for-nothing front-liners?" He waved his muddied fist.

The third man stood his ground. He said, "*And* there are complaints about the absence of adequate safety engineering."

"Safety engineering!" Saturnly blew up. "Why, when *I* was a front-line operative—and I knew the business, I can tell you, because I

worked up to it from a low-down factory job—we kicked out any safety engineers that had the nerve to come sniffing around our trenches!"

"Care to join the union at this late date?" asked the third man imperturbably.

Neddar's return coincided with the outburst of fresh pandemonium. He gave one apprehensive look. Three skipping strides carried him to Whitlow and put his bearded mouth two inches from the pacifist's ear.

"We did deceive you," he said rapidly, "but it was only to avoid giving you an even more false impression. Let me clear out this rabble. Don't come to a decision until we've talked to you."

Without waiting for a reply, he darted to Saturnly and drew him toward the door, pulling the rest of the crowd after him like planets after a sun.

Fifteen minutes later Neddar was still trying to pry Saturnly away. The second and third man had departed with their satellites, but Saturnly was hanging onto the first man and giving him certain instructions that caused him to lose his defeated look and finally hurry off excitedly.

Neddar redoubled his tugging. Saturnly did not at once yield to it He turned his head. His broad face wore a beamy, glazed smile. "Wait a minute, Neddy," he said. "I see it all now. Of course, when you first brought the guy in and tipped me off about time streams, I got the idea they were something we should go for. But you know how it is with me—I can only think when there's no opportunity to. It was only when those boobs came in and started to yammer at me that I really began to see the possibilities."

"Yes, yes," said Neddar. "And while you gloat, he slips through our fingers. Come on."

But in his exultation Saturnly was imperturbable. "Just think, Neddy, worlds like ours—maybe dozens of them—and we got a monopoly on the trade. A real open-door policy—nobody but us can open it. We got a surplus—we know where to unload it. There's a scarcity—we know where we can get some. We got critical materials by the tail. We set up secret branch offices— Oh, Neddy!"

Only then did he allow himself to be led off.

They passed through three rooms. All had the stripped look of Saturnly's office, yet there was still not enough space for the new installations and occupants. A battery of nimble-fingered girls tended transmitters of some sort. Others typed and lightwrote. Wall maps

glowed vital information. Table maps had chess played on them by delicate logistic machines. Rakish young men in windbreakers lounged against the walls. Occasionally one of them would snatch up a packet and dart out into the night.

Various individuals, badgeless and badged, assailed and importuned Saturnly.

"Sign this, J. S.!"

"Those front-liners won't let us bring up reinforcements, J. S. They're picketing the communication trenches!"

"J. S., the aircrafters' brotherhood has offered to take disciplinary measures against the front-liners. Can I give them the go ahead?"

But Neddar did not look to either side, and Saturnly's tranced, Buddha-like smile said nothing.

Only when they came to the blonde secretary's desk, beside the door with the motto over it, did Neddar pause grudgingly.

"If there are any important calls, you might as well let them come through," he said bitterly. "There's no longer any use in trying to keep our visitor in the dark."

She favored him with a poisonous smile.

"We're all set, then?" he asked Saturnly. "We admit everything and try to sell him on it?"

"We sell him," Saturnly echoed positively.

Neddar hesitated. "There's only one thing worries me," he said darkly. "Your unfortunate tendency to tell the truth in crises."

"Ha—a liar like me!" Saturnly laughed, but a shadow of uneasiness flickered across his face.

Mr. Whitlow had obviously used the fifteen minutes for thinking. Lingering puzzlement and cold anger were the apparent results. The latter predominated.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but there's no longer any possibility of an understanding between us. Your world is a war world like all the rest, except that it masks it in a peculiarly repellent fashion."

"That ain't war," said Saturnly gaily. His exuberance in situations like this perpetually amazed Neddar. "Sit down, Mr. Whitlow. That's just Coldefinc conducting its legitimate business enterprises."

"Coldefinc?"

"Sure. Columbian Defense, Inc."

"Don't think to deceive me by any such ridiculous rigmarole," said

Whitlow venomously. "It's obvious that, whatever you call yourself, you've seized supreme political power in your country."

"Mr. Whitlow, you make me angry," said Saturnly genially. "I'm sorry, but you do. I'm a respectable businessman."

"But you conduct wars. Only governments can maintain an army and navy."

"That's right," said Saturnly genially. "Come to think of it, they *did* maintain an army and navy—until we bought 'em up."

"But it's impossible!" Whitlow was beginning to argue. "In all worlds I have visited, it is the governments and the governments alone that conduct wars."

"You amaze me," Neddar interjected. "Government is the older form of social organization, business the newer. According to all natural expectations, the newer form should gradually absorb all or most of the activities of the older form."

"Primitive," Saturnly confirmed.

"But don't you have any government at all?" Whitlow demanded.

"Sure," said Saturnly. "Only it doesn't do anything except make things legal."

"An empty sham!" said Whitlow. "How, without armed forces, can government enforce the laws it makes?"

"By prestige alone," Neddar answered. "There was a time when religion clubbed people into becoming converts. When the center of social organization shifted elsewhere, religion had to change its methods—rather to its advantage, I believe.

"Moreover," he added gravely, "I thought you were an enemy of exercise of force by government, as in war."

Whitlow sat back. For a moment he had nothing to say.

"Government incorporates us, we do the rest," Saturnly concluded. "The point is, Mr. Whitlow, as I've been trying to tell you, that Coldefinc is a legitimate business enterprise, working hard every minute to satisfy its customers, to make money for its stockholders, and to pay its ungrateful employees a lot higher wages than they deserve."

"Customers?" Whitlow mumbled. "Stock—?"

"Sure, customers. We sell 'em defense. That's how we got started. Government was slipping. Crime was on the up. There were lots of disorders. There had just been a big, inconclusive war and everybody was dissatisfied. They didn't want any army or navy, but they did want protection. O.K., we sold it to 'em."

"*Now* I understand!" Whitlow interjected, a whiplash quality in his voice, his eyes burning. "We had it in our world. You're just the same thing, grown to monstrous proportions. Racketeers!"

"Mr. Whitlow!" Saturnly was on his feet. Neddar lightwrote, "Watch yourself!" but Saturnly didn't even see it. "You *will* make me mad. Every step of the way Coldefinc has conformed to law. Should I read you the Supreme Court decision that because it's any man's right to carry arms, it's all right for him to hire somebody to do it for him? Why, we're so clean we haven't done any strikebreaking—at least for outsiders. How can anything be a racket if it's completely legal?"

Neddar lightwrote, "Excuse me. I thought you were going to say something else. That was perfect."

Saturnly sat down. "To continue where I left off at. We sold 'em defense. First, private individuals and other businesses, especially those with racketeers—we had 'em here too, Mr. Whitlow—on their necks. Then small communities that were tired of police departments that did nothing but graft. We advertised—dignified. We expanded—and so we could sell our product cheaper. Then came a war scare."

To give him a breather, Neddar chipped in with, "Meanwhile, similar developments were taking place in all fields of social activity. Forelinc—Foreign Relations, Inc.—absorbed all but the purely formal activities of the diplomatic service. Social-service companies vied as to which could sell its customers the cheapest and happiest ways of life."

"Then came a war scare," Saturnly resumed determinedly. "People howled for our product. Our stocks boomed. We increased our plant—for years we'd been hiring away the best army and navy officers; now we bought the entire personnel and equipment from the government dirt cheap and used what we could of it. We started a monster sales campaign—this time to include neighboring countries. We—"

Whitlow nervously waved for time to ask a question. His face was a study in confusions and uncertainties.

"Do I understand you right," he faltered incredulously. "You've really organized war—"

"Defense."

"—on a business basis? You sell it like any other product? You issue stock that fluctuates in value according to the failure or success of your activities?"

"Correct, Mr. Whitlow. That's why you didn't see any war headlines. It's all on the financial page."

"And you don't draft soldiers—"

"Operatives."

"—but hire them just like any other business?"

"Absolutely. Though a front-liner usually has to work his way up through other jobs. First in a munitions factory, so he learns all about our weapons. Next, transport and distribution, so he gets that end of it. Then maybe he gets a chance at a front-line job and the big money."

"You mean to say you pay your front-line soldiers—"

"Operatives."

"—more than anyone else?"

"Naturally."

"But that's detestable," said Whitlow righteously, as if seizing any opportunity to maintain resentment. "In my world there are soldiers, but at least we don't try to gild the dungheap by paying them high wages."

"What?" Saturnly asked. "You mean in your world an operative doesn't get as much as a factory hand? Or doesn't anyone make any money?"

"No," Whitlow replied angrily, "a factory worker is well paid. We have wage scales governing such things."

"But that's terrible," said Saturnly. He seemed shocked. "A front-liner has to have all kinds of skills, and besides, it's dangerous work, as dangerous as mining—maybe more—maybe almost as risky as deep-sea diving."

Whitlow wilted. He looked dazed. "Then those men that rushed in here a while back—they really were talking about a strike by front-line operatives?"

"Sure."

"But how can you allow such a thing? Surely it will enable the enemy—" Whitlow looked up, his eyes widening. "Who is your enemy?"

"Right now it is the Fatherland Cartel," Saturnly replied breezily. "You needn't worry, Mr. Whitlow—it's just a little sit-down strike the boys are having. They'll hold the line if they have to. The only bad thing is that it'll slow up the big push—for a while," he added cryptically.

"Then you're actually engaged in fighting a war—a real war? It's business—but at the same time it's war?"

"Of course, Mr. Whitlow," Saturnly replied patiently. "We try to de-

fend our customers without fighting, but if we have to, we fight. Coldefinc always delivers."

"And that war is like any other war? Battles, invasions, encirclement and annihilation of the enemy army?"

"Liquidation of his plant," Saturnly corrected. "Though of course we're all businessmen and try to avoid useless waste." He airily waved a hand. "Oh, yes, those things happen, but they aren't the really important part of the war. The important part is the underlying financial situation."

"Yes?" A sudden new interest lighted Whitlow's eyes. Neddar noted it, and his tense watchfulness was broken so far as his fingers were concerned. He lightwrote, "Concentrate on this angle. You're going great. Just don't get excited."

Saturnly leaned forward, beaming. "Mr. Whitlow, I know I can trust you. You're not of this world, and what's happening in it doesn't mean anything to you." He paused. "Mr. Whitlow, it's a dead secret, but in a few days Coldefinc will have the Fatherland Cartel by the tail. Through disguised holding companies in neutral countries we've been buying up stock in the component organizations of the cartel. The big push is mainly to scare a few people into letting go their shares. Pretty soon we'll have more than fifty per cent, and then, Mr. Whitlow, this war will be over like that." He snapped his fingers.

Whitlow goggled. "You mean all you have to do is to get a controlling interest in the enemy organization?"

"Sure."

"And the enemy will submit to it?"

"What else can they do? Business is business."

"And you won't have to invade or annihilate them? Untold killing and destruction will be avoided? You won't lose many of your operatives?"

Saturnly shrugged. "Not more than in normal times."

"Mr. Saturnly!" Whitlow stood up. The new interest had grown to a consuming, fanatic flame. "I have a proposal to make to *you*. Could you do that sort of thing for my world?" He held out his hand as if he were giving it to Saturnly.

"Um-m-m." Saturnly leaned back, frowning. Neddar rejoiced at the way he masked his triumph with an air of reluctance. "I'd have to think it over. It's a big proposition, Mr. Whitlow."

"I'd provide the means of entry," the pacifist continued rapidly. "You

could bring across whatever you'd need in the way of operatives and . . . er . . . plant."

"I dunno," said Saturnly dubiously. "Is there any business at all in your world, or does government run everything? If there isn't, it'll be pretty hard for us to get an in."

"Oh, there's business, all right," Whitlow reassured him. "Though at present somewhat submerged."

"And are there any neutral countries? Or are they all in the war?"

"There are still a few neutrals."

Saturnly thought. Whitlow hung on his reactions.

"Well, we'd have to go slow at first," Saturnly finally said ruminatively. "There'd be the matter of sales research, sizing up likely prospects, setting up pioneer offices, and also incorporating firms to front for us—that's where the neutral countries would come in handy." He began to warm up. "Then we build up plant and personnel—the latter mixed, from both worlds. Then feeler campaigns, trial balloons, preliminary advertising and promotion. With all that set, we really start in." He turned to Whitlow. "Of course, if we get that far, there's no doubt of our ultimate success, because we'll be all business and they'll be just maybe half business and half government—an awful jumble."

Whitlow nodded eagerly. Neddar lightwrote: "You've got him, J. S.!"

Saturnly laid his hand authoritatively on the table. "First we sell the neutral countries—they'll want protection the worst way, because they won't know which side is going to jump them first. At the same time we start hiring out to do small jobs for the warring nations—we pose as kind of war-industrial specialists. Maybe the neutral countries get invaded and we have a chance to show our stuff. Maybe the small jobs grow into big ones. Maybe both." He was really warmed up now. "Either way, our stocks boom. We put in more plant, increase personnel, start a major sales campaign. People begin to have more confidence in us than in their government armies. We pick one of the big powers—whichever is slipping, it doesn't matter which—and buy it out. The other side—we outorganize 'em, outbuy 'em, hit 'em hard on both the financial and operational fronts. And then—"

The phone purred. Automatically, Saturnly snatched it up and bawled into it, "Yes?" A wait, while Whitlow swayed forward in pale-faced, hypnotized eagerness. Then in a roar, "What do you mean bothering me with trifles like the strike being called off when I'm fixed

with something important?" Suddenly a wicked smile fattened his face. "Oh, it's you, Dulger? You don't like me sending whisky to those front-liners? Well, what would you want if you were out there in all that mud?" From beyond the walls, making them tremble faintly, came suddenly a many-voiced rumbling. It kept on. "Hear that, Dulger? It's the big push. Oh, you're going to indict me for corrupting my workers? Good. Good! Maybe some day when you start a real man he-man's union, I'll join it."

He turned back. His lips formed, "And then—"

But there had been time for his previous words to ferment in Whitlow's emotion-drunk soul. The pacifist's face was a mask of fanatic ecstasy, and his voice was hoarsely vibrant against the grumbling guns as he finished for him: "And then, Mr. Saturnly, will come the millennium to which the nobler side of mankind has always aspired, that utopia of perfect and gentle brotherhood which your world will so soon attain and which you will ultimately bring to mine, that purified existence from which all hatred and strife, all greed and war, have been forever banished. I refer, Mr. Saturnly, to that most precious of all blessings—peace."

"WHAT!" Slowly Saturnly came to his feet, crouching bearlike. Slowly his bulging neck suffused with red, with purple. In vain Neddar plucked, tugged, jerked at his sleeve, desperately lightwrote, "Don't, J. S. Don't! DON'T!", resorted to even more drastic efforts to shut him up. He might as well have tried to quiet a god. In the rapidly shifting excitement, the truth-telling mechanism buried deep in Saturnly had been set in motion and now could no more be stopped than if Saturnly had been Juggernaut's car.

"You . . . you talk to John Saturnly of PEACE when you know War is his business?" He loomed over the astounded pacifist like a prehistoric idol. His voice boomed from the walls. "You'd have me wreck a world organization that I built up with these hands? You'd have me throw my customers to the dogs? Bankrupt my stockholders? Fire millions of loyal employees out into a world where they would drift around unemployed and help start a real mess? No, Mr. Whitlow, I'll gladly help you with your proposition, but you must understand that if Coldefinc tackles your world, it will be war from then on—forever!" He sucked up a great breath and drew himself erect. "Maybe, Mr. Whitlow, you didn't read the motto over the door when you came in. 'When there are bigger wars, Coldefinc will wage them!' "

The pacifist shrank back in horror, shock, and fear.

"I . . . you—" he mumbled brokenly. Then it all came out in a whimpering rush. "I won't have anything to do with you, you fiend!"

"Oh, yes, you will!" Saturnly came around the table, crouching. "You're going to show us how to cross time." He kept coming. The pacifist was wedged in a corner and fumbling with his coat. "We've been nice to you, Mr. Whitlow, but now that's over. I don't like people who try to go back on me." Whitlow's hands came out with what looked like a small gray egg. He fingered it in a panicky rhythm, and his face went blank as if he were desperately trying to concentrate on some thought. Saturnly closed in. "We're going to have your secret, Mr. Whitlow, whether you get anything for it or not." Then, suddenly, "Stop him, Neddar! Stop him! That way! No, that way!"

Both men dove, Saturnly with a bearlike lunge, Neddar with an incredibly pantherlike leap. They clutched air, scrambled up, looked around. Mr. Whitlow was gone.

For a long while nothing was said or done. Then, slowly, heavily, Saturnly walked back to the desk and sat down and pressed his face in his hands.

"He faded," said Neddar in a voice that likewise faded. "He got misty and went curving off . . . at an increasing tangent . . . toward an alternate future—"

Then his rapierlike anger flashed out. His eyes seemed to spark and his black beard to crackle with the electricity of it. He whirled on Saturnly.

"You big, honest, imbecile! How you ever got this far, even with me to do your conniving for you, I don't know. You had him sold. We had worlds within our grasp, worlds ripe for exploitation and conquest, worlds for sale at bargain prices, and you had to go sincere and scare him off—forever. Oh, you bumbling ape!"

"I know." Saturnly pressed his face harder. Neddar twisted his features in one last bitter grimace, then tossed it off, sighed, and almost smiled.

Saturnly peeped at him guiltily between thick fingers.

"You know, Neddy," he said softly, "maybe in a way it's just as well this didn't go any farther. You know how I think—always while I'm doing something else. Well, while I was selling this guy I was thinking of something very different. You know, Neddy, our world is maybe kind of peculiar. We rate business and money and financial things

above everything. They're our ultimates. If something's decided in a business way, it never occurs to us to try to go around it or look for any other answer. Maybe it isn't that way in the other worlds. I know it's hard to imagine, but maybe they wouldn't think of business as the ultimate. Maybe the people in those other worlds are sort of different . . . sort of crazy—" His voice changed, took on a note almost of relief, as he finished, "At least, if they're anything like that Whitlow guy!"

Frank Belknap Long

TO FOLLOW KNOWLEDGE

Ever since this story first appeared, over ten years ago, it has exercised an almost mesmeric effect on a goodly number of science-fiction readers. They read and reread it, and every time they are newly caught up in its "patterns of confusion." Indeed, the story is probably the ultimate that can be accomplished with the idea of the simultaneous existence, within space-time, of an infinite number of worlds between which actual travel is possible.

Read the story with some care. Don't rush through it. If you do, you may *get lost. And if you get lost, maybe you'll never get back. . . .*

"To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought."
Tennyson

CUMMINGS put his hand out through the porthole and dug his fingers into the river.

"Oh, my aunt!" he mouthed.

Ralph Temple, rolling over in his bunk, blinked drowsily. "Wassamatta, Ned?"

"Nothing much. River's getting harder, that's all. River's all scrooched up."

Temple sat up straight. Although they were in almost total darkness he could see the shadowy outlines of his companion's head and shoulders. He could also hear the paddle wheels turning and smell the dank, high walls of the rain forest.

"Turn on the niagara lamp and take a look," Cummings urged. "I must be going nuts!"

Temple got swayingly to his feet. He was beginning to remember now. It was coming back.

"How would you like to have twenty toes instead of ten?" Morrison had asked. "How would you like to turn around and meet yourself—yesterday?"

Up above, a dull, spreading radiance was coming into sight. It seemed to flow down toward him over something that looked a little

like the keyboard of a piano which someone had designed without calipers to avoid offending a forty-foot giant.

He couldn't stand not knowing. Clutching his hat firmly, he climbed up toward the light.

"Holy smokes!" he gasped.

He had been merely stunned at first, down in the thick blackness, but up here under the cold, brittle stars a man had either to cry out or go mad.

He cried out. Into the vast, stellar night went his little voice, and the knobby legs of Pegasus seemed to lengthen. But, of course, that was nonsense. The constellations couldn't change. Not while he—

His lips tightened, and all the blood drained from his face. The night sky had begun to lurch. Pegasus was growing horns, and there was a frothy cluster of new stars surrounding the Pleiades.

Someone was calling to him from the thick blackness. "Ralph, where are you? Come back at once."

He crawled back on his hands and knees. He was conscious as he straightened of a dozen eyes trained relentlessly upon him. He stood rigid in the darkness, his spine a column of ice, his fists knotted up tight.

It seemed ages before a match flared and his darling came into view. Her coppery hair, unbound and falling like a veil before her face, failed utterly to cloak the fury in her gaze.

"Well, you did it," she rasped, staring at him as though he were some loathsome insect that ought to be crushed.

"Joan, I—"

"I thought the machine was unfinished," she flung at him.

"I know. I thought so myself."

He looked around at the seated girls. Giggling, they had trooped in to look at the bare, dry bones of an untested *guess.*

Well, the guess was going places now. It was traveling at full throttle, and the morning papers would have a sensational story to report.

His stomach felt tight and hollow and he was sweating at every pore. "I'm sorry," he choked.

"You ought to be, Ralph Temple," the coppery-haired girl flared. "One minute we are in the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences. The next we are in darkness, heaven knows where."

"Where is Ned?" Temple asked hoarsely. "I was just now talking to him."

"Ned says he's in another place. A sort of cabin or stateroom, with water flowing past outside the portholes. Only it isn't water. It's thick, like glue."

Temple felt around beneath him until he located a chair. He sat down and swabbed a perspiring brow.

All right, he had played Pandora. But plenty of people of both sexes had done that since the Faradays and the Morrisons had started inventing things back in the dim Pleistocene. Plenty of people had cut their thumbs on experimental arrowheads, and poked around in kitchen middens, and lifted the lids on hives of mechanical bees.

It wasn't a crime to play Pandora. But building a time machine, and pretending it was just a guess in up-to-the-minute plastics and mysterious curves was . . . was—

Well, he hoped they'd arrest Morrison and send him to prison for life. It was all coming back now. Morrison had persuaded the directors of the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences that his big, unfinished question mark of a machine would pack them in at the Science of Tomorrow Exhibit.

Morrison was never so persuasive as when he stressed the value of publicity to men as "impractical" as himself. It hadn't taken him more than five minutes to convince the directors that mathematical physicists were white-haired boys to the Fourth Estate, and could pull Sunday supplement write-ups out of their hats.

Bitterly, Temple recalled that he, Morrison, and Ned were supposed to be buddies. They had gone through military school and college together and shared youth's long dream of incredible things to come. Then Morrison had strayed off toward a Ph.D., Ned had taken up engineering, and he, Ralph Temple, had inherited two million dollars.

It made a difference. You could not expect a scholarly mathematical physicist, an engineer bronzed by sun and wind in the tropics, and a Park Avenue playboy to remain close buddies.

You could not expect it, but, hell—it had happened. To Ned and himself had come passes to the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences accompanied by chummy little notes from Morrison.

Ned
Dear :
Ralph

My machine goes on exhibition tomorrow. I'm hoping the

public will be sufficiently impressed to contribute a cool million. There's a lad named Ralph Temple could start the ball rolling, but first he'll have to come and see.

All best, as always,

Morri.

Outside the Science of Tomorrow Exhibit, Morrison had greeted them effusively and opened up with: "Ralph, Joan—Ned, old fellow. Say, this is all right."

"You're telling me," Ned had chuckled. "Ralph is letting me hold Joan's hand in the fourth dimension. Did you notice?"

"No, but you may be doing that in sober actuality one of these days. How would you like to travel in the direction of motion with the speed of light? How would you like to turn around and meet yourself—yesterday?"

"What would Ralph have to do?" Joan had asked.

Temple had turned away and was frowning heavily, but Ned appeared to be enjoying himself hugely.

He winked at Temple's girl. "He'd have to be double-jointed in the fourth dimension. But he wasn't asking Ralph. He was asking me."

Morrison grinned. "I was asking both of you."

"Well, to meet himself yesterday, a man would either have to be double-jointed in the fourth dimension, or travel completely around the Universe of Stars. Isn't that so?"

Morrison shook his head. "No, not at all. When my machine is completed he would simply have to depress a little knob, and—*pouf!*"

"You mean he'd vanish?" Joan asked.

"From earth, yes. But things would become interesting for him elsewhere."

They had then gone into Morrison's machine. It was curious, but he couldn't remember what the machine looked like now.

Morrison had stayed outside. A group of giggling schoolgirls had come in, girls ranging in years from sixteen to twenty.

Joan had pointed to a little, gleaming knob. "*That* knob, do you suppose?"

Oh, God, why had he done it? He was not a young show-off but a man with graying temples and crow's-feet around his eyes. He was not a zany.

Or was he? Like most sensitive and imaginative men, he had a cha-

meleon side to this nature. In an environment of giggling frivolity his personality underwent a change. He could become positively infantile when the people around him were behaving like high-grade morons.

"Sweetheart," he said suddenly, "how much would you be willing to bet that Morrison wasn't kidding us?"

"How much would I be willing—"

"—to bet, darling? I have a feeling I could set this machine in motion just by shutting my eyes and pressing down hard."

"I'll just bet you couldn't."

"I'll bet I could."

"I bet you couldn't."

"I bet I could."

"You couldn't."

"I could."

"Couldn't."

"Could."

"Say, what is this?" Ned had interposed. "How much would it cost me to get in on it?"

"We'll all be in on it together," Temple had replied, depressing the knob.

Joan was plucking at his sleeve now, a rising hysteria in her voice.

"Ask Ned where he is," she pleaded. "He can hear us, Ralph."

Temple stood up. It was with an effort that he kept his voice low. "Where are we?" he husked. "That's what I want to know. Where are we?"

"We're inside the machine, of course," Joan said, as though she were addressing a child. "But Ned isn't. He's somewhere else. When I speak to him he answers, but he keeps talking about portholes and water than doesn't flow. Where can he be?"

"I'll find out," Temple said, and shouted, "Ned, Ned, can you hear me?"

"I can hear you, all right," Ned's voice came angrily out of the darkness. "Where did you go?"

One of the schoolgirls began to sob in the darkness.

"Stop that," Joan said sharply. "Stop that at once."

The sobbing subsided.

"Where are you, Ned?" Joan asked.

"Joan? Is that you, Joan? I told you. I'm in a sort of cabin, and

Ralph was here with me. But he climbed up somewhere, and now he's talking to me and I can't see him."

"Do you remember anything about Morrison's time machine?" Joan asked.

"Morrison? Good heavens, I haven't seen the old boy in five . . . no, six years."

"See?" Joan said. "I told you. Ned is somewhere else."

"Ned," Temple said. "Think back carefully. Where were you *before* you woke up and told me that the water had turned to glue?"

"Say, what is this?" Cummings muttered. "You were right here with me. You ought to know."

"But Ralph wasn't with you," Joan said. "He was here with us. He crawled up out of sight and came back again, but he wasn't gone for more than a minute."

"Hold on, Joan," Temple said. "That isn't strickly true. I was with him, but I did climb up toward the stars. Over something that felt a little like an ascending flight of stairs . . . no, a good deal like. Then I climbed down back. But I wasn't here before I climbed up."

"But you were," Joan insisted. "I lit a match and saw you."

"But how could I be in two places at the same time?"

"Didn't Morrison say something about . . . about meeting yourself yesterday?"

"Ralph, Ralph, I remember now," Ned's voice tore out of the darkness. "We're in the *Morning Star*. We're steaming up the Orinoco. Ralph, are you there?"

Ralph was, but he didn't say anything. He just sat down on the edge of the bunk and stared at Cummings. The sun was pushing into the cabin now, and he could see the muddy brown river streaming by. By lying in his bunk and reaching out a hand he could easily enough have scooped up a little water. But he had asked Ned to do the scooping, because he had awakened logy and reaching down would have robbed him of a yawn.

The boat was one of those flat-bottomed jobs with paddle wheels on both sides, and the deck of their cabin was so far below water level that the brown tide kept threatening to come in through the open ports.

All that had seemed pretty nice once. Temple had been younger by fifteen years and hadn't come into his inheritance yet. Lying there in the cool Brazilian dawn, with the water almost level with his eyes, he had thought himself the luckiest young chap alive.

There was something about the lower levels of a rain forest, glimpsed across muddy brown water, that lifted a man to the stars.

The stars. The changing stars, up there above him somewhere.

He sucked in his breath sharply. Ned was staring at him as though he had suddenly sprouted horns and towered to an incredible height.

"Ralph, you look ghastly," he husked. "You look twenty years older."

"I am older, Ned," he said.

"Huh?"

"Ned, this is the trip we took right after I graduated, right after you got your first job. You were trying to persuade me to go in for engineering, too."

He looked straight at Cummings.

"Ned, last night we split a bottle of port. Just now we both awakened with slight hang-overs. You asked me how far up I thought we were. I said you could find out by scooping up some water and tasting it. The Orinoco is brackish for two hundred miles."

"I know," Ned said. "And I just now told you that the river—"

"Never mind what you told me. That isn't important. Ned, we didn't split that bottle of port last night. It wasn't last night. It was years ago. You're still a college kid, but I'm not. I've aged a helluva lot."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Ned said shakily.

"Ned, think back. Don't you remember what happened in the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences?"

"I never heard of the place."

"But you just now spoke to Joan. You spoke to Joan out of the darkness."

"Joan? I . . . yes, the name is familiar. I have a feeling that if she spoke to me I would know her."

"Don't you remember my leaving you and crawling up toward the stars?" Temple prodded.

"You . . . you climbed up and saw the stars?"

"Yes, and crawled back into darkness. I spoke to you there, and you answered me. Now I'm going to raise my voice and try to speak to Joan. Joan," he called. "Joan, can you hear me?"

"Oh, darling, where are you?"

"We're in a boat with paddle wheels steaming up the Orinoco River —in South America," he added, to make sure that she would not misunderstand him.

"Darling, climb up the stairs again. You can, can't you?"

"No. There are no longer any stairs."

"But I climbed up, darling. Just now. Ralph, we are in the center of a strange new star cluster. *All* the stars are different."

Temple scarcely heard her. He was staring out the open port at something black and ungainly that had emerged from the rain forest and was winging its way toward the ship.

It was not a bird, but a flying reptile with membraneous wings that looked—he caught his breath—that looked exactly like a pterodactyl!

Someone was screaming in the darkness. "Oh, don't let it touch me. Keep it off, keep it away from me."

Temple dragged himself forward on his hands and knees, his heart hammering against his ribs. One of the schoolgirls was down on the floor, and an enormous, shadowy something was bending over her. An enormous carapaced something that bore a terrifying resemblance to a giant water bug.

Fiercely Temple grappled with it. There was a long-drawn, plaintive wail, and the thing flaked away in his clasp, leaving his fingers locked together.

A match flared, and Joan came into view, her brows raised and her eyes searching his face.

Temple looked down at the thing. It wasn't. That is to say, there was a negation of light on the floor which could have been made by something vanishing. Only that, and nothing more.

But the schoolgirl was in his arms, and her companions were clustering about him.

"No wonder you came back," Joan almost hissed. She backed away from him, her eyes blazing.

The match went out.

Impatiently Temple untangled the cool, clinging arms of a girl of perhaps eighteen from about himself.

"Joan, I found myself on my hands and knees in the darkness. I heard this young lady scream and saw something—"

"You *did?* I saw nothing."

"Oh, but there was a something," the girl sobbed. "He saved my life."

Temple felt around beneath him until he located a chair. He sat down.

"Joan, I think I can explain everything," he said.

"Ralph Temple, I don't care to listen," came out of the darkness.

"You ought to listen," the schoolgirl sobbed. "I'll listen. What is it, Ralph?"

"*Ralph*. Of all the gall!"

"Joan, listen to me. You know what happens if you travel with the speed of light?"

"I know. A lot of silly children get romantic notions about a man old enough to be a grandfather."

"Joan, I am thirty-seven," Temple reminded her. "And I'm not getting any older. Ned is fifteen years younger, and at any moment I may be a youngster myself. I think we ought to know where we stand. There may be surprises ahead for all of us."

"You mean, Ned went back in time? But if we were just traveling with the speed of light we'd be the same forever. We wouldn't even be moving about where . . . wherever we are. But we *are* moving about. Therefore we must be traveling a little faster than the speed of light. We must— No, wait a minute."

She paused an instant, then resumed. "I was a problem child in physics at Vassar, but I seem to remember that only time on earth would stand still. If you moved with the speed of light and looked back at earth, everything would appear to be standing still. If you moved faster, events on earth would *unhappen*."

"That's right," Temple said. "People who don't think things through imagine that events would repeat themselves in little jerks. Come to a head, so to speak, and then unwind feet foremost. Actually they would unhappen continuously, roll backward until all history repeated itself in reverse."

"But only on earth," Joan reminded him. "We could observe that reversal only by moving away from earth in the direction of motion faster than light. And we could move about and grow older while watching it if we were traveling in a time machine. Our motion would not be relative in relation to the machine. That seems sort of tautological but you get what I mean."

"I get what you mean," Temple said. "And without realizing it you've put your finger on the crux of our predicament. We don't know what reality would be like in a higher dimension than we can perceive with our limited endowments of sight, touch, and hearing, but it seems unlikely that a time machine would just move away from earth with the speed of light.

"If it did that, it would be merely a space traveler. It could only rope in space-time by exceeding the speed of light, and even then a reversal of entropy would not throw us back into our own pasts on earth. We'd just be in limbo somewhere in the rind of the continuum, or, if you prefer, outside the Universe of Stars."

"What are you driving at, Ralph?"

"Simply this. I believe Morrison was merely speaking figuratively when he talked about traveling with the speed of light. I believe that we are in limbo as far as the physical universe is concerned, but following along a fifth- or possibly sixth-dimensional time track which takes in practically everything.

"I think we're in it up to our necks. I think it includes all the time-frames produced in the physical universe by motion in space, and a lot of other frames as well.

"I think we're inside the Universe of Stars, and outside it, and back with ourselves yesterday, and catching up with ourselves tomorrow. I think we're in a topsy-turvy world where anything could happen."

"Ralph!"

"Well, I was in two places at the same time, and I climbed up and looked at the changing stars over a stairway that comes and goes. And although Ned is back in the past, it's an abnormal past in half a dozen respects. In the first place, it's unraveling in the direction of the future, which is the way it wouldn't unravel if we were traveling away from it in the direction of motion. In the second place, something has interfered with the molecular flow of the water outside the boat, and I saw something that looked like a pterodactyl come flapping out of the rain forest.

"In the third place, although I can move back where Ned is, I don't grow younger when I move back, and I can remember things that he has forgotten. In the fourth place, we can talk to one another *across* time, and if you know anything about acoustics I don't need to point out that you can't do that ordinarily. In the fifth place, the thing that came in just now from *outside* flaked away when I clasped it, and couldn't have been—"

Temple leaped back with a choking gasp. Another shape was coming toward him through the darkness, a faintly luminous shape that bore a terrifying resemblance to a magnified body louse.

"How would you like to have twenty toes instead of ten?" Temple asked. "How would you like to turn around and meet yourself—yesterday?"

"Huh?" the old man muttered, stroking his thin beard. "What say, youngster?"

"Grandpop, I'm not a youngster. I will be forty-four come midsummer. But I was a youngster, a green kid of twenty-two, when I picked up this scar."

As he spoke, Temple opened his hand and exposed a palm which was all knots and livid creases.

"Aye, I was young myself once, son," the old man said, and there was a dignity in his gaze which had not been there a moment before.

Temple elevated his fishing rod and leaned forward on the black wharf. He hoped they'd catch something. The flats were supposed to be running. Up and down the wharf other fishermen were pulling them in, but he hadn't had a bite for hours.

The blue sunlight seemed to deepen about him as he parried the old man's stare. "There was too much life on that planet, grandpop," he said. "It filled the hollows and windy places, and dripped down into the sea."

The old man nodded, his bleary gaze traveling to an orange-red bobber far out on the flaking tide. "The third planet from the sun, you say, in a system with nine planets?"

"That's right, grandpop. Nine planets—one very small, four a little larger, or a little smaller than Kamith, three quite huge, and one larger than all the rest put together. One of the huge ones was encircled by a series of wide, flat rings—two luminous and one smoky, with dark bands separating them."

"There is a planet like that in the Rugol system," the old man said.

"I know. But this system was close to the center of the known universe and had a quite ordinary sun. In density, size, and luminosity quite ordinary."

"Hm-m-m."

"But that third planet was not ordinary, grandpop. It was more remarkable in some respects than the ringed planet. It was as though—well, you know what happens when you overfertilize a garden plot?"

The old man nodded. "I have loved flowers all my life," he said.

"We think we know what parasitism is, but we don't. We don't at all. On Kamith we have a few plants which suck the juices from other

plants, a few animals which prey on other animals. But on that planet—*ugh.*"

He leaned forward and spat into the flaking tide. "There was too much life on that planet, grandpop, but there was also something else. Courage outlasting the vehicle that gave it birth, human thought surviving the brain from which it came."

Temple scrutinized the horizon somberly for an instant, his fingers tightening on the cork handle of his fishing rod.

"Grandpop, I think we must accept the theory that life evolves along parallel lines everywhere in the Universe of Stars," he said. "Before we invented space-time machines we thought our sun with its five planets was a stellar anomaly, but we know now that there are other planetary systems scattered throughout space, other cool worlds capable of supporting life.

"The blue sun that warms Kamith is not the only life-giver. The giant red suns on the rim of space have their Kamiths, too, their inhospitable outer planets, and there are suns no larger than planets, with satellites so small that—"

"In fifteen minutes I've got to wind up my reel," the old man prodded. "My daughter goes off the handle when I'm late for supper."

"Well, we were there in one of those backward-forward jobs that set your teeth on edge when you're deep in the continuum, and make you wish that time-space machines had never been invented," Temple said. "We had come out on the bleak, northern plains of a continent shaped like a swollen question mark.

"We set electrostatic surveyors to work the instant we emerged, and blocked in the outlines of the entire land mass on our geodesic screen. A little to the southeast of us there was a long, straight river opening into a shallow bay, and a little to the northwest were five large lakes that looked on the screen like sausages strung on a wire.

"But of course small, cool, inner planets are pretty much the same the universe over, and in general the topography didn't differ much from . . . well, from back there."

He twisted his shoulders about and gestured toward the rolling farm country behind him.

"How many were in the party with you?" asked the old man.

"There were fifteen of us, grandpop. We were there on an assignment which took in nearly every branch of natural science."

"Interstellar Survey, eh?"

"That's right, grandpop. The Survey has been limping along without me for thirteen years now, but I was a promising youngster in those days and knew more about field theory than my chief."

"I cornered the market once," the old man said. "Now they don't even remember me down on the Street."

"The Survey remembers me, all right," Temple said. "But I inherited fifty thousand a few years ago and decided to become a gentleman of leisure. Right after the crash I tried to get back, but, hell—there were six thousand young upstarts lined up ahead of me."

"With a little foresight, a man can live on very little," the other said.

Temple nodded. "I've learned how to economize. But to get back to this little inner planet. Everything was covered over with an oozy coating of life. It was like jelly, and it took different shapes—"

"Could you maybe describe it without adjectives, son? My daughter gets on a high horse when I'm late for—"

"Well, think of a china cabinet filled with bric-a-brac. The cabinet is the skeleton of some animal dead a hundred thousand years. The bric-a-brac is the slime building up into cubes, octahedrons, icosahedrons, stellated dodecahedrons, and so on. We even encountered a few snub cubes.

"In case you don't know, a snub cube is a thirty-eight-faced figure having at each corner four triangles and one square. Six faces belong to the cube proper, eight to the coaxial octahedron, and the remaining twenty-four to no regular solid."

"Ouch, son. I've never had no regular schooling in mathematics."

"What I'm trying to say, grandpop, is that this slimy, primitive life seemed to conform to the laws of crystallization. We found crystallographic axes of reference when we studied the stuff, but of course the more complicated polyhedrons would have baffled a crystallographer. About the most complicated example of *crystalline* growth is a scalenohedron built up of rhombohedra."

"That's what I'll be eating for supper tonight, boy, if you don't get on with it."

"Well, I'm convinced that the stuff was alive in a protoplasmic sense, for there was a dumbbell shape that traveled around like a rhizopod as well as long ribbons of slime which feasted on the polyhedrons and dripped and drooled all over the landscape. Most of the polyhedrons had an eaten-away look, and of course kept dissolving back into structureless slime.

"If it wasn't for your daughter I could ramble on for hours, because it was the strangest kind of life imaginable. It was life which sustained itself by preying on the more complicated aspects of itself, if you get what I mean."

"You mean it built itself up into something, got tired of being eaten alive by itself, and dissolved back into slime."

"That's about the size of it," Temple said.

"But, son, why didn't it eat itself altogether up?"

Temple shrugged. "Perhaps it reproduced by absorbing solar radiations as well as featsting on itself," he said. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"You were saying, son—"

"Well, when we stumbled on the huge, corrugated cylinder we thought at first it was just the skeleton of one of the old backboned animal forms that had roamed that planet once—another china cabinet. Joan was so sure it was a china cabinet that she started scraping off the jellylike coating of polyhedrons with a stick, and—"

"Joan?" the old man wanted to know.

"She was our geologist. A silly little thing. A strawberry-blond geologist."

"When I was twenty," the old man said, "I liked blondes, brunettes, and redheads. How could she be on the Survey if she wasn't bright?"

"Oh, she was bright enough when she forgot that she was a woman. But when she accidentally remembered, her I. Q. of one hundred and fifty went into eclipse—"

"You were saying—"

"When Joan scraped off the polyhedrons and exposed a corrugated expanse of gleaming metal she leaped back into my arms and held on tight to me.

"I was plenty startled myself. The cylinder was about one-fourth the size of our backward-forward jeep, and there was a little projecting knob at one end. At first glance it looked large enough to hold five or six people, if you packed them in tight.

"Actually, it was large enough to hold a round dozen standing about in groups. It's hard to realize how much room there is inside a really large cylinder unless you shut your eyes and run an imaginary line parallel to itself through the circumference of a curve. I mean, you have to sort of construct another cylinder in your mind's eye."

"Son, my daughter—"

Temple nodded. "You've asked me to hurry this along, so I'll skip over how we felt inside ourselves and concentrate on what happened inside the cylinder."

"The knob opened it up, eh?"

"The instant we tugged at it. There was a humming sound, and the end of the cylinder swung inward, revealing a patch of inky blackness divided into sections by hanging ribbons of slime.

"In other words, the slime had seeped into the cylinder, and we could hear it dripping all about us in the darkness. I walked in first, and Joan came tagging after.

"I advanced eight or ten feet over a floor that seemed to keep slipping out from under me, and then put a hand out to one side. Under my palm the wall seemed to crawl, and I wanted to turn around and get out the instant the slime started coiling around my wrist. But for an instant I couldn't seem to move. I heard Joan cry out, but I couldn't move a muscle.

"Up above me a dull, spreading radiance was coming into sight. It seemed to flow down toward me over something that looked a little like the keyboard of a piano which someone had designed without calipers to avoid offending a forty-foot giant.

"As I stared up some chill thing brushed me and the light grew brighter.

"My head began to spin, and for a minute I felt as though all the breath were being squeezed from my lungs. I fell to my knees and started climbing up toward the light. Although the surface beneath me felt a little like an ascending flight of stairs, it could have been simply a corrugated metal ramp covered over with a thin coating of slime.

"For a long time I kept climbing. The higher I climbed the brighter the light became, and suddenly it was blazing all about me and I was no longer alone.

"She was sitting on a high wooden stool clasping a rag doll, grandpop —a little girl not more than six years of age, with curly auburn hair and dimples in both cheeks. She seemed to be in a sort of day nursery. Behind her was a wall with animals on it, and above her was a pale green skylight, and she was digging her knuckles into her eyes and sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Grandpop, I recognized her despite the dazzling light and the dimples, and the fact that her feet scarcely touched the floor. She was our

strawberry-blond geologist, the girl who had leaped back into my arms not five minutes before.

"She had Joan's hair and lips and eyes, and when she stopped crying and looked straight at me there was a glint of dawning recognition in her gaze which chilled my heart like ice.

"Grandpop, nothing could much surprise me after that, but it was terrifying all the same to find myself suddenly in another place, surrounded by utterly blank walls and under a green light that streamed down upon me from a sort of inverted funnel set in an overhead that had a mirrorlike sheen and kept moving erratically about.

"When I looked down at my feet I got another jolt. I had four feet, two pointing ahead and two pointing straight back. Worst of all, my shoes had become completely transparent and I could see all twenty of my toes.

"I started wriggling them, first on one set of feet, then on the other, my heart going drippety-drop. I was still at it when the light went out and a long, gleaming panel studded with little knobby protuberances came into sight."

There was a brief instant of stillness while Temple cleared his throat.

"Grandpop, that panel looked exactly like the control panel of Morrison's dimension-dissolving jeep—the big, unfinished question mark of a machine that stood in the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences a quarter of a century ago."

"But, son, how could that be?" the old man gasped.

"Grandpop, I don't know, unless—well, you remember what I said about life evolving along parallel lines everywhere in the Universe of Stars?"

The old man hunched his eyebrows. "Life perhaps, son. But certainly not the products of human civilization, not complicated inventions."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not, son. Primitive human societies don't become complex and give rise to a flood of mechanical gadgets by natural selection. But even if they did, the chances of exact parallels occurring on any two planets, let alone a million planets, could only be expressed by a figure trailing off into more zeros than there are light corpuscles in the Universe of Stars."

"Grandpop, I've a feeling you're wrong. There seems to be a dynamic chopping block at work everywhere in the universe which lops off most of those zeros. You can call it the Law of Eliminative Recur-

rences or anything you like so long as you broaden it to include not only biological evolution but the whole vital scheme of things from protein molecules to—well, to backward-forward jeeps and Museums of Industrial Arts and Sciences."

"I don't quite—"

"Well, perhaps an equation will help you to see what I'm driving at. A cluster of protein molecules from the warm, primordial seas of *any* cool inner planet, plus a billion years of time, equals a Morrison dimension-dissolving jeep in a Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences."

The old man's jaw gapped. "But, son, that's just another way of saying that the makings of life anywhere in the universe would turn into you and me sitting here."

"Given time, yes."

"Just a minute, son. Before you say another word, there's something I want to get straightened out. What's your name?"

"Huh?"

"What's your name son?"

"Ralph Temple."

"All right. Mine's Ned Cummings. You mean to say there are a millon Ned Cummingses and Ralph Temples, all exactly alike, on a million inhabited worlds?"

"Well, I said that the panel inside that cylinder was exactly like the panel of Morrison's machine. But I had an odd feeling that the spacing between the plug-ins was a hairbreadth wider here, narrower there; the color of the metal a shade darker—"

"How could you tell, son?" Did you see Morrison's machine?"

"I did, grandpop. I spent an entire afternoon in the Museum of Industrial Arts and Sciences a quarter of a century ago. Grandpop, Morrison was a man of genius. Had he lived to complete that jeep we might now be breaking down time tracks right up to the sixth dimension."

The old man stared. "You *knew* Morrison?"

"I did, grandpop. We went to college together."

"I see. Son, you haven't answered my question."

"Well, as to being *exactly* alike I . . . don't know. There might be deviations and discrepancies. On other planets we might not be caught up in the same sequence of events or have the same casual relations one to another. What I saw inside that cylinder convinces me that the parallels I spoke of may be as alike-unlike as certain crystalline aggre-

gates. That is to say, you may get clusters that are identical, others that vary a little, and a few that go off the deep end, so to speak.

"We may be duplicated exactly on twenty thousand worlds and closely a half million times. Morrison's jeep may be duplicated with a black, gray, or even pink control panel. We may be sitting here fishing on planets Zwolle and Aason, and on planet Sebek you may be my own great-grandfather. You've got to remember that the similarities could be simply staggering in patterns that go off the deep end in half a dozen respects. I mean, if we stick to the crystalline aggregate analogy."

"We may as well stick to it, son."

"Well, the pattern inside that cylinder had gone off the deep end with a vengeance. Someone back there on that little inner planet, some other Morrison, had lived to complete his jeep. Grandpop, that panel had been set for a trip right up through the sixth dimension and back down around through the inner-outer rinds of fifth- and fourth-dimensional space.

"Grandpop, *our* Morrison had spent an hour and a half explaining that plug-in to me. It was to be his greatest achievement, the most ingenious of six alternative plug-ins. Once around the sixth dimension, grandpop. Up and around you go, and before you know it you're right back where you started from."

"You mean it was set for a round trip."

"For a round trip, grandpop. But as soon as I saw that panel I knew that something had gone wrong and that the Strangeness was in permanent command."

"The Strangeness?"

Temple nodded. "Our Morrison called it the Strangeness, as though it were a living thing. He showed me a bulb, grandpop—a little green bulb set in the control panel."

Temple cleared his throat. "Grandpop, you've got to remember that no one knew as much about the higher dimensions of time as our Morrison. He had calculated the properties of time bent back upon itself, with a number of curious little vacuum-tube gadgets which looked like miniature replicas of the machine.

"He . . . he had another name for the Strangeness, grandpop. He called it the Dimension of Unreason. He thought he could send the machine around up through it and around down back without permanently injuring the people inside.

"But of course he wasn't sure. His jeep was never completed, and I doubt if it ever will be. His notes and diagrams and models have baffled our best minds for a quarter of a century now.

"Grandpop, Morrison told me that the bulb was a delicately adjusted synchronoscope. So long as it remained intact, he assured me, the plug-in would carry the machine once around the sixth dimension. The Strangeness would warp space-time frames inside the machine but wouldn't actually break them down. So long as the bulb remained intact, the warped frames would straighten out again and the passengers return to a twentieth century Kamith alive and unharmed. 'But if the bulb goes, Ralph, the machine will return a million years in the future, and the passengers will be dust, and I wouldn't want to step inside or be on the same planet with the Strangeness.'

"Whenever I shut my eyes, grandpop, and travel back in memory to that day at the museum I can still hear our Morrison making out a case against himself. He was planning to use three or four people as guinea pigs, precisely as the other Morrison had done.

"Grandpop, kneeling there in the other Morrison's machine, staring down at the other Morrison's control panel, I realized with a sickening jolt that the weird crystalline life that filled the hollows and windy places and dripped down into the sea was a part of the Strangeness. It hadn't seeped into the machine at all. It was from the sixth dimension and had seeped out of the machine over a sterile world.

"Grandpop, on that control panel the bulb was no longer intact. On that panel the bulb had been smashed! Cold sweat poured out over me as I stared at it, and suddenly I was no longer alone in the darkness. Pressed close to me was the Joan I had lost, a Joan who was no longer a little girl.

" 'I've been searching for you everywhere,' she sobbed 'Though the blackness, the thick blackness—'

"Grandpop, I took that half-hysterical, strawberry-blond chit of a girl into my arms and kissed her.

"I suppose it meant I was glad she had come back. A man scarcely knows when he is all cold inside and wants to crawl off where the Strangeness can't get at him.

"We were holding on tight to each other and trying to reach some kind of swift decision that would light a little candle of hope for us in the darkness, when the voices started in.

"All about us in the darkness we could hear a faint, musical whispering.

" 'Get out, get out quickly. Flee. Escape—get out, get out. Escape, we'll help you. There is still time. Escape, get out—flee.'

"Joan gasped, and the back of my neck seemed to freeze.

" 'We are one and we are many, and we will help you.'

"A little sob flew out of Joan's throat, and the darkness seemed to turn over to embrace us more tightly.

"Something was taking shape directly before us, grandpop. Something that looked a good deal like a great shining wheel. We could see the spokes, but the circumference of the disk was enveloped in a nebulous haze, and the hub was a filmy blur that had an air of being somehow terrifyingly *alive.*

"Unmistakably, as we stared, the wheel pulsed and brightened, and suddenly the circumference resolved itself into a circle of bobbing faces joined by weaving filaments of flame. The sad, calm faces, grandpop, of twelve young girls ranging in years from sixteen to twenty. Around and around they went, with luminous flickerings. Around and around, as inexorably as a sunmill.

"Grandpop, the circumference of that wheel overshadowed all the nightmares of my childhood, but what turned my blood to ice were the faces at the hub. From the hub of that great revolving wheel our own faces stared back at us. Joan's face and my face, and the face of a young man who looked a little like *you,* grandpop. He was scarcely more than a boy, and his hair was jet black, but somehow—he reminded me of you."

"Good Lord," the old man said.

"Suddenly the voices started in again. 'Stand up, join hands, and walk eight paces forward. There is still time.'

"Grandpop, we were under a compulsion. We *had* to obey. Joan's small, moist hand crept into mine and we got swayingly to our feet.

"Trembling in every limb, we took eight tottering steps forward. Instantly the darkness fell away and we found ourselves standing on a high white cliff overlooking a tranquil sea. When we looked down into the water we could see broken domes and turrets and twisted masses of wreckage, and when we looked up the sky had a timeless look and the sun was a hoary disk that seemed to be nearing the cinder stage.

"The desolation everywhere about us was terrifying, but looking down was especially bad because the sea was shallow for miles, and we could tell at a glance that an inventive age had drawn a canceling line through all of its achievements from the viewpoint of humanity.

"Looking down, I thought of Edgar Allan Poe's 'City in the Sea':

> 'There shrines and palaces and towers,
> Time-eaten towers that tremble not,
> Resemble nothing that is ours.
> Around by shifting winds forgot,
> Resignedly beneath the sky,
> The melancholy waters lie.'

"Maybe that city had once stood on a high mountain peak, and time had leveled it. I never knew, for the scene around us suddenly changed, and we were in the midst of a mighty forest, grandpop. Enormous mottled serpents dangled from the boughs overhead, and an odor as of rotting vegetation surged heavy on the tainted air.

" 'Turn right, and take four slow steps backward,' the voices hummed.

"Automatically we obeyed. The floor seemed to rise, and we were standing on another cliff gazing out over another sea. But now there was no city beneath the waves. We seemed rather to be gazing out over a scenic from the Jurassic Age. In icy shallows polar lilies grew, and directly beneath us a huge, long-necked lizard shape was floundering sluggishly about.

" 'You're moving now through fairly stable time-frames,' the voices hummed. 'We're helping you out. Keep your hands clasped, and advance six short steps.'

"Mechanically we obeyed. Within a space of seconds the cliff dropped away and all about us there appeared—*machines,* grandpop. Dozens of great, glistening, manlike machines that stood staring at us with a subtle air of contempt, as though we hadn't ought to.

" 'Turn left now—sharply,' the voices hummed. 'Walk straight ahead. There are forces here which could destroy you. You must walk straight out.'

"The sullen robots fell away as we swung about. Sweating in every pore, we advanced toward a square of misty radiance that pulsed and expanded and grew swiftly brighter until it seemed to fill all space about us.

" 'Pass straight out. Go back to your own world. Go back—go back.'

"The voices had grown fainter, but we could still hear them, grandpop. In the midst of the glow, and as we broke into a run—plaintive and pleading and hauntingly musical.

" 'You must not stay. You must go back to your own world. There will be upheavals, for the life on the plains and mountains is alien to Urth. It is alien, alien—it is building up tension.' "

"To *Urth?*" the old man interrupted.

"To Urth, grandpop—a name with a strange, raw rasp to it. A name difficult to pronounce."

"And the voices hummed—"

" 'Good-by and good luck. You must not stay. Go back to your own world. Go back, go back. Good-by and good luck.'

"Grandpop, the radiance became blinding suddenly, and we felt ourselves falling."

Temple set down his fishing rod, leaned forward, and opened his hand again. "See that scar, grandpop?"

"You showed me it before, son."

"Well, it was my wedding present to her."

The old man's jaw fell open. "Your wedding—"

"Instead of *joining* hands, we underwent a minor operation. We had to do that. We couldn't spend the rest of our lives holding hands, could we?"

The old man's jaw sagged lower. "So you're ticky in the coco! I might have known. Ticky in—"

Temple smiled. "Grandpop, when we found ourselves outside the cylinder on the dun, firm ground, with that strange crystalline life all about us again, I'll admit I thought so myself. For a moment I doubted my own sanity. But when we got swayingly to our feet, it was as though my sanity had been multiplied a hundredfold. For when Joan tried to pull her hand from my clasp, and it wouldn't come free, only a *very* sane man could have taken it in his stride. Y' see what I mean?

"Looking down, and observing that our palms had been welded together by 'wild talents' inside the Dimension of Unreason, I didn't go off the deep end. I knew that we'd been lucky and that a minor operation was all that we'd be needing."

"Holy suffering cats!"

"She was just a little thing, grandpop. But when you hold a woman's

hand day after day, week after week—there were no surgeons on board our backward-forward jeep—you're apt to find yourself getting all steamed up over trifles you've never even noticed before. I began by overlooking her defects, and ended by asking her to marry me.

"Grandpop, we were spliced by the commander on the twelfth week out. Later on, I got to thinking. Take two pairs of people, grandpop. One pair is the exact duplicate of the other pair. They look and think and feel alike, and there isn't a hairbreadth of difference between them. Have you really four people, or just two people?"

"Son, I couldn't say. I'm not Hegel."

"Well, for twenty-two years now, grandpop, Joan and I have been making up for all the happiness we lost near the center of the known universe—on a cool little inner planet called Urth. And somehow, grandpop, I've a feeling that the faces at the hub of that wheel had hoped that we'd do that.

"I have a feeling that the wheel was—well, courage outlasting the vehicle that gave it birth, human thought surviving the brain from which it came.

"Grandpop, there may be a million Joan Harveys and Ralph Temples in the Universe of Stars, and some of us may have gone off the deep end. But here on Kamith, Joan and I have made up for all the losses, for all the mishaps, for all the patterns that didn't jell right. We may have been Morrison's guinea pigs on Urth, but on Kamith—"

"I wish I had caught some flats," the old man said, getting slowly to his feet. "Yes, I see what you mean. I see what you mean, lad."

"Give your daughter these," Temple said, raising a string of summer flounders from the flaking tide. "I'll stay and catch some more. Joan won't be expecting me for another hour yet."